Project LIFT: Year 1 Report

Prepared by Research for Action
April 18, 2014

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RESEARCH for ACTION

About Research for Action

Research for Action (RFA) is a Philadelphia-based nonprofit organization. We seek to use research as the basis for the improvement of educational opportunities and outcomes for traditionally underserved students. Our work is designed to: strengthen public schools and postsecondary institutions; provide research-based recommendations to policymakers, practitioners, and the public at the local, state, and national levels; and enrich the civic and community dialogue about public education. For more information, please visit our website at www.researchforaction.org.

Acknowledgements

This evaluation is being conducted with the support of the Project LIFT Governance Board and Project LIFT leadership to monitor the progress of the initiative in meeting it long term goals. We express our appreciation to Denise Watts, Christian Friend, and Douglas Jones along with the rest of the Project LIFT staff for their support for the external evaluation in Year One. In addition, the CMS Research, Evaluation & Analytics office staff provided invaluable support for the external evaluation in Year One. We would also like to thank the principals at all the Project LIFT schools: West Charlotte High School, Ranson Middle School, Allenbrook Elementary, Ashley Park Elementary, Bruns Academy, Druid Hill Academy, Thomasboro Academy, and Walter G. Byers Elementary for their participation in the first year of the evaluation. We greatly appreciate the support we've received from the LIFT partners, teachers, and other CMS administrators who participated in the Year One evaluation; and we look forward to building on these relationship in future years through our ongoing research efforts.

This report was greatly enhanced by the contributions of many RFA staff and interns. We greatly appreciate the work of Kimberly Edmunds who provided tremendous support for the qualitative data collection and analyses. In addition, Katie Englander provided invaluable support for both the qualitative and quantitative analyses and presentation of results while Noemi Gonzalez supported the quantitative data management and analyses. We especially appreciate the oversight provided by Dr. Kate Shaw, Executive Director; Dr. Stephanie Levin, Associate Director; Alison Murawski, Communications Director; and Allison Petrosky, Communications Assistant.

Table of Contents

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Research for Action (RFA) is currently in the second year of a five-year external evaluation of the Project Leadership and Investment for Transformation (LIFT) Initiative in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District (CMS). Project LIFT is a public-private partnership between CMS and the local philanthropic and business communities in Charlotte, designed to turnaround nine schools in the West Charlotte Corridor. Starting in the 2012-13 school year, Project LIFT operates as a semi-autonomous Zone within CMS, providing the initiative with CMS infrastructural support and access to an initial $55 Million investment of private resources to drive a multifaceted reform effort in Charlotte's highest poverty schools. Project LIFT's long-term goals are to significantly improve student achievement in the following ways: 1) 90% of students will achieve proficiency in math and English across the zone; 2) 90% of students will meet annual growth goals in math and English; and, 3) 90% of WCHS students will graduate on time.

In the Fall of 2013, RFA produced and delivered an Implementation Memo to the LIFT staff providing key highlights of Year One implementation successes, challenges, and contextual factors that affected implementation during the 2012-13 school year.[1] This Year One Report provides a comprehensive analysis of the first year of the initiative, incorporating key highlights of Year One implementation with a presentation of student behavioral and academic achievement outcomes for the 2012-13 school year.

Below, we summarize key contextual factors affecting Year One Implementation; provide an overview of implementation successes and challenges; and summarize the results of two types of outcomes analyses: School Climate and Academic Proficiency.

[1] See Appendix V for Implementation Memo

Key Findings – Contextual Factors Affecting Year One Implementation

Changes at the State and District Level

- Prior to the 2012-13 school year, the North Carolina End-of Grade[2] (EOG) and End-of-Course[3] (EOC) state standardized tests were significantly adjusted by North Carolina's Department of Public Instruction to align with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). This adjustment represents a major shift in North Carolina's statewide student assessment system because the new tests are designed to measure a set of more demanding skills focused on college and career readiness.

- Prior to the start of LIFT's planning year (2011-12), the former Superintendent, Dr. Peter Gorman, announced his departure. Dr. Heath Morrison was hired in July 2012, just prior to the start of Year One of Project LIFT. Thus at the outset of the initiative, the LIFT leadership embarked on the implementation of a highly complex initiative with CMS leaders who were not intimately familiar with the LIFT design and planning process.

Changes at the Zone and School Level Associated with Year One Implementation

- By design, many of the LIFT principals were relatively new to their schools leading up to the initiative. Most LIFT principals were strategically placed in these schools through the CMS Strategic Staffing initiative, which places dynamic, high-performing leaders in challenging school settings.[4] These principals brought with them teams of new staff members that were equally challenged to adapt to the new school setting. These principals also faced considerable challenges related to new grade configurations for some LIFT schools[5], staff turnover, and an overall reduction in the number of experienced teachers in LIFT schools. Over the course of Year One, expanding enrollments at all LIFT schools added additional pressure on LIFT school leaders and staff to continue to meet the needs of growing student populations.

- Prior to the start of the 2012-13 school year, principals at LIFT schools were given the authority to displace existing teachers with teachers selected from a national talent pool cultivated by the LIFT staff. In addition, teachers at LIFT schools were given the option to voluntarily transfer to another CMS school prior to the start of the initiation. Coming into the 2012-13 school year, approximately 275 new teachers, comprising over 60% of all teachers at LIFT schools, were newly hired immediately prior to, or during, Year One. Incorporating these new teachers, getting them acclimated to the day-to-day activities in their schools and aligning their pedagogical practices with the priorities of the LIFT initiative, presented considerable challenges for the LIFT staff and principals in Year One of the initiative.

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[2] End-of-Grade assessments occur in grades 3-8 for Math and Reading and grades 5 and 8 for Science.

[3] End-of-Course assessments occur in grades 9-12 for the following courses: Math 1, English 2, and Biology.

[4] The CMS strategic staffing policy allows principals to assemble teams that could include one assistant principal, a literacy facilitator, a behavior management technician, and up to five teachers with proven success. Principals could not only bring a new team in, but they were given some latitude in "pruning" existing school staff. Each principal could have as many as five teachers removed from the school's staff.

[5] Ashley Park Elementary, Bruns Academy, Druid Hills Academy, Thomasboro Academy, & Walter G. Byers School were converted from a K-5 to a Pre-K-8 school model during the 2011-12 school year.

Year One Implementation Included both Successes & Challenges

Year One of the initiative included a number of important **implementation successes and challenges** across the four focus areas that provided a strong foundation for the initiative leading into Year Two, as summarized in Table i.

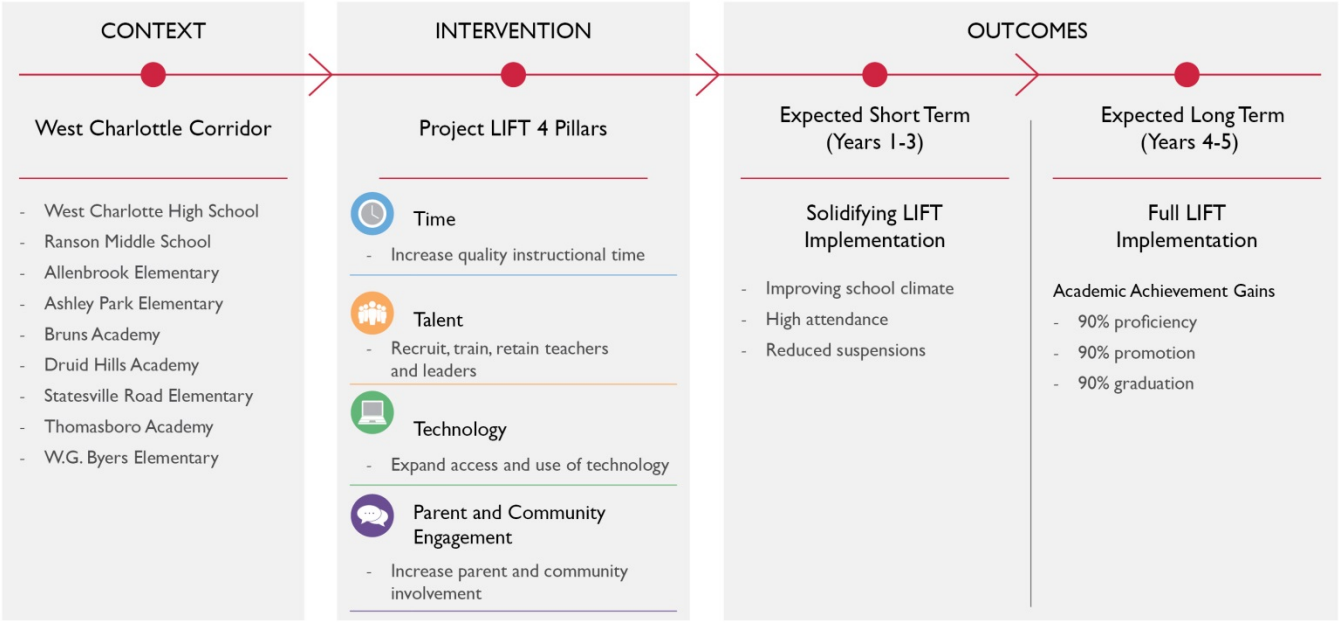
Table i. Preliminary Implementation Successes and Challenges

SUCCESSES	CHALLENGES
TALENT	
• LIFT schools were fully staffed with mission-aligned principals and teachers. • LIFT principals coalesced into a supportive professional learning community.	• There were limited supports for Teach for America (TFA) corps members in LIFT schools. • LIFT staff experienced turnover and vacancies throughout Year One.
TIME	
• Instructional time was extended through partnerships with OST providers. • New academic calendars for 2013-14 were established at four LIFT schools.	• Limited funding prevented the adoption of Continuous Learning Calendars at all schools requesting these new calendars. • Standards for quality afterschool programs were not established, limiting guidance for partnership development. • There was limited capacity to secure quality pre-school options for all four-year-old students in the LIFT zone. • Credit recovery needs of WCHS students exceeded the capacity of the LIFT Academy.
TECHNOLOGY	
• New technologies were integrated to support principals, teachers and students to improve their performance.	• LIFT delayed the roll out of the OLPC program, limiting the integration of the new technology into teaching and instruction in Year One • LIFT schools did not have the infrastructure to support new technologies.
PARENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	
• Innovative parent and community engagement strategies began to show promising results.	• LIFT staffing to support parent and community engagement was insufficient until mid-year. • LIFT staff and partners had limited capacity to meet the socio-emotional needs of LIFT students.

Although LIFT experienced some notable successes, it is clear the initiative was still being developed and refined over the course of Year One. As Project LIFT continues to roll out within this broader context it is important to keep in mind that large complex initiatives like Project LIFT take time to be

introduced, get established, and generate the desired results. Figure i, below, presents a Theory of Change for Project LIFT.

Figure i. Project LIFT: Theory of Change



Our findings are aligned with the following contemporary theories of key elements and early outcomes associated with complex turnaround efforts in high poverty schools:[6]

- Multi-faceted school turnaround initiatives create major changes in schools during start up.
- Full implementation of turnaround initiatives can take multiple years.
- Turnaround schools typically make early strides to improve school climate and build on existing support in local communities.
- These initial changes create the conditions necessary for increased academic achievement in later years of the initiative.

Key Findings – Year One Student Outcomes: School Climate

Multiple Signs of Climate Improvement in LIFT Schools

Attendance, out of school suspensions, and Early Warning Indicators of school dropout have all be identified as key drivers of longer term academic success.[7] Analyses of these climate indicators in Year One reveal the following:

[6] Bryk et. al 2010
[7] Mac Iver, 2013; Neild and Balfanz 2006

- Across the LIFT Zone, student attendance was very high in Year One.

- The majority of LIFT elementary/middle schools' suspensions either declined or remained roughly constant in Year One.

- West Charlotte High School saw dramatic improvements on a number of school climate indicators:
  - Substantial reductions in out of school suspensions;
  - Significant reductions in the accumulation of Early Warning Indicators of school dropout by the 2012-13 9th grade cohort, specifically:
    - Fewer students with attendance below 80%;
    - Fewer students with multiple out of school suspensions;
    - Fewer students who failed a course; and,
    - Fewer students who earned 3 or fewer credits.
  - Significant increases in the percentage of the 2012-13 9th grade cohort who are on-track to graduate after Year One.

Table iii presents a summary of LIFT school performance along these key climate measures in Year One.

Table iii. LIFT School Climate Measures in Year One

LIFT Schools	Average Daily Attendance Above 90% in 2012-13	OSS Reductions	EWI Reductions Incoming 9th Grade Cohort	On-Track to Graduation Increases for Incoming 9th Grade Cohort
Allenbrook (K-5)	✓		N/A	N/A
Statesville Rd (K-5)	✓		N/A	N/A
Ashley Park (PK-8)	✓	✓	N/A	N/A
Bruns (PK-8)	✓		N/A	N/A
Druid Hills (PK-8)	✓		N/A	N/A
Thomasboro (PK-8)	✓	✓	N/A	N/A
W.G. Byers (PK-8)	✓	✓	N/A	N/A
Ranson MS (6-8)	✓	✓	N/A	N/A
West Charlotte HS (9-12)	✓	✓	✓	✓

Key Findings – Year One Student Outcomes: Academic Proficiency

Significant increases in academic proficiency were not expected to emerge in Year One (see Theory of Change, above).

Table iv, provides a summary of the percentage of students scoring proficient or above on each of the EOG and EOC Assessments at each LIFT school in 2012-13.

Table iv. Percentage of Students Proficient on EOG and EOC Assessments at LIFT Schools: 2012-13

	End of Grade Assessments		
LIFT Schools	Math	Reading	Science (Grade 5 & 8)
LIFT Elementary/Middle Students (3-8)	24%	20%*	37%*
Comparison Students (3-8)	25%	26%*	33%*
CMS District (3-8)	46%	46%	54%
Allenbrook (K-5)	39%	24%	20%
Statesville Rd (K-5)	27%	18%	39%
Ashley Park (PK-8)	32%	22%	41%
Bruns (PK-8)	14%	13%	25%
Druid Hills (PK-8)	12%	15%	11%
Thomasboro (PK-8)	32%	18%	35%
W.G. Byers (PK-8)	18%	14%	56%
Ranson (6-8)	23%	26%	48%
	End of Course Assessments		
	Math I	English II	Biology
West Charlotte HS (9-12)	18%	24%	18%
CMS District (9-12)	46%	46%	48%

** Group difference between LIFT and Comparison Students were statistically significant (p<.05)*

Compared to similar students in non-LIFT schools:

- A significantly greater percentage of LIFT students scored proficient or above on the Science EOG (37% v. 33%).
- A significantly lower percentage of LIFT students scored proficient or above on the Reading EOG (20% v. 26%).

While proficiency levels were low across the LIFT Zone, there was considerable variation across the LIFT elementary/middle schools' proficiency levels on the EOG assessments.

- Both K-5 elementary schools - Allenbrook and Statesville Road - were in the top half of LIFT schools on the Math and Reading EOGs.

- Ashley Park was in the top half of schools on each of the EOGs.
- Students at Walter G. Byers exceeded the CMS proficiency rate on the Science EOG.
- Bruns and Druid Hills were among the bottom three LIFT schools on each of the EOGs.

Summary and Next Steps

Year One Outcomes at Project LIFT Schools Align with Existing Theories of School Reform

As seen in the LIFT Theory of Change (see above) the initial findings presented in this memo generally align with contemporary theories of the key elements and early outcomes associated with complex turnaround efforts in high poverty schools.

At this early stage in the initiative, the findings presented in this Year One report point to promising signs of climate improvement in all LIFT schools, and room for considerable improvement in student achievement measures. Moving into future years of the initiative, the external evaluation will continue to track key elements of Project LIFT implementation and the student outcomes aligned with the initiative's long term goals.

Project LIFT Staff Continue to Refine Implementation in Year Two

Throughout Year Two of the initiative the LIFT staff members have made a number of key adjustments and refinements to the strategies identified in our Implementation Memo (See Appendix V). In Winter 2013-14, RFA conducted in-depth interviews with all LIFT staff to better understand how Year Two implementation efforts adjusted to address short and long term goals for the initiative.

Planned Year Two Analyses

The analyses for the Year Two report will assess the behavioral and academic performance of LIFT students within the context of these following key elements of LIFT implementation during the 2013-14 school year:

Talent
- Solidifying Data Driven Instruction and the 'LIFT Way'
- Deploying Multi-Classroom Leaders to Support Targeted Teachers
- Enhancing Teacher Recruitment

Time
- Rolling out Continuous Learning Calendars

Technology
- Transitioning from Increased Access to Strategic Use of New Technologies

Parent/Community Engagement
- Establishing School-Based Resource Teams to Connect Schools and Local Communities

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Introduction

Research for Action (RFA) is currently in the second year of a five-year external evaluation of the Project Leadership and Investment for Transformation (LIFT) Initiative in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District (CMS).

Project LIFT is a five-year district turnaround effort created through a public-private partnership between CMS and the local philanthropic and business communities. An initial investment of $55 million in private support facilitated the development of a semi-autonomous "LIFT zone" within CMS, solely dedicated to the rapid turnaround of the eight elementary and middle schools that feed into West Charlotte High School (WCHS) in the West Charlotte Corridor (WCC).[8] While Project LIFT shares some similarities with other public-private partnerships in public education (e.g., the Harlem Children's Zone), it is distinguished by its institutional position within CMS and its focus on developing partnerships to implement the turnaround initiative. Project LIFT's long-term goals are to significantly improve student achievement in the following ways: 1) 90% of students will achieve proficiency in math and English across the zone; 2) 90% of students will meet annual growth goals in math and English; and, 3) 90% of WCHS students will graduate on time.

RFA's evaluation began in May 2012. In response to a delay in receiving student outcome data,[9] Year One evaluation findings are being delivered in two installments. The first installment, a Preliminary Implementation Memo, was submitted to the LIFT leadership in September 2013. The memo presents implementation findings from our qualitative fieldwork during Year One of the initiative. The second installment is this Year One Report, which provides a more comprehensive analysis of the first year of the initiative by integrating key highlights from the previous Memo's qualitative findings with student outcome findings related to behavior and academic achievement for the 2012-13 school year.

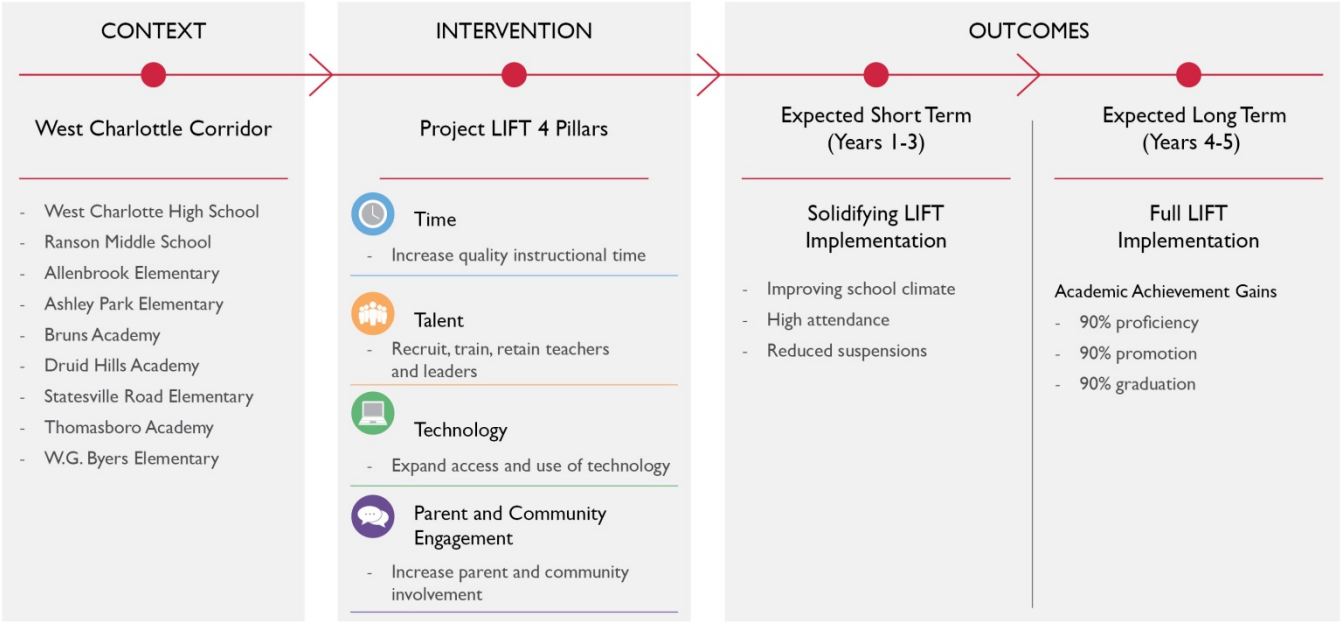
Theory of Change

Large, complex initiatives like Project LIFT require significant time to be fully implemented and generate the desired results. Figure 1, below, presents a Theory of Change for the Project LIFT Initiative

[8] CMS schools are organized by high school feeder patterns into seven distinct zones. In a recent shift within CMS, beginning with the 2013-14 school year *zones* will now be referred to as *learning communities*. Throughout this report, we will still refer to the Project LIFT schools as the LIFT zone.
[9] The delay in receiving student outcome data was due to North Carolina's standardized test changes during the 2012-13 school year.

that is aligned with key elements and expected outcomes of comprehensive school reform efforts in high poverty schools.

Figure 1. Project LIFT: Theory of Change



Throughout the remainder of this report, the findings we present align with the following contemporary theories of key elements and early outcomes associated with complex turnaround efforts in high poverty schools[10]:

- Multi-faceted school turnaround initiatives create major changes in schools during start up.
- Full implementation of turnaround initiatives can take multiple years.
- Turnaround schools typically make early strides to improve school climate and build on existing support in local communities.
- These initial changes create the conditions necessary for increased academic achievement in later years of the initiative.

Organization of the Year One Report

This report is organized into the following four sections, reflecting the major elements of the Theory of Change above:

Section I: Project LIFT in Context includes:

- State, district and zone-level factors impacting LIFT implementation; and,
- A brief summary of Year One qualitative implementation findings[11].

Section II: Year 1 Student Outcomes: School Climate (attendance and behavior)

Section III: Year 1 Student Outcomes: Student Proficiency Rates

[10] Bryk et. al 2010
[11] Key findings from the Implementation memo were presented to the LIFT Leadership and the LIFT Governance Board in September, 2013.

Section IV: Summary of Year 1 Report and Preview of Year II Evaluation concludes the report with a brief review of Year One findings, an early look at refinements and adjustments to LIFT implementation strategies in Year Two, and a preview of our Year Two analyses.

Section I. Project LIFT in Context

Although LIFT has the potential to operate more autonomously than other zones within CMS, it is still embedded within the larger structures of the state and district. In this section, we provide an overview of key changes at the state, district and zone levels leading up to and during the 2012-13 school year that affected LIFT implementation and the climate at LIFT schools. We then present successes and challenges of Year One implementation across each of the four focus areas of the LIFT initiative: *Talent*, *Time*, *Technology*, and *Parent and Community Support* as presented in the September Implementation Memo.

State and Local Contexts Impacting LIFT Implementation

Changes in state testing policy, CMS leadership, and school personnel and student demographics were all salient to LIFT's first year. We describe these factors and identify their implications below.

Prior to the 2012-13 school year, the North Carolina End-of Grade[12] (EOG) and End-of-Course[13] (EOC) state standardized tests were significantly adjusted by North Carolina's Department of Public Instruction to align with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). This adjustment represents a major shift in North Carolina's statewide student assessment system because the new tests are designed to measure a set of more demanding skills focused on college and career readiness.

North Carolina is among only seven states and the District of Columbia that had fully integrated the CCSS into their assessment systems during the 2012-13 school year.[14] As these states have begun to implement assessments aligned with the CCSS, many have experienced substantial declines in the proficiency scores of their students in all subjects. Throughout the rest of the country, states and districts are still in the process of aligning their curricula with the CCSS to provide instruction that helps students develop the necessary skills to be successful in the 21st century.

Not surprisingly, across North Carolina, school districts experienced declines in proficiency levels, including many urban districts such as Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Wake County, Guildford County and Forsythe County.[15] While many schools showed significant reductions in proficiency levels, LIFT schools remained among the lowest performing schools within CMS. Specific to our evaluation of LIFT, these revised state assessments created a new proficiency baseline that cannot be compared to prior

[12] End-of-Grade assessments occur in grades 3-8 for *Math* and *Reading* and grades 5 and 8 for *Science*.
[13] End-of-Course assessments occur in grades 9-12 for the following courses: Math 1, English 2, and Biology.
[14] In addition to North Carolina, GA, DE, ME, KY, MS, MI, and DC also integrated their state testing systems with the CCSS. Source: http://www.corestandards.org/in-the-states
[15] See Appendix for NC county-level comparisons of student academic proficiency rates.

performance. Moreover, this change also positions LIFT schools' proficiency rates farther below the five-year goals that were set in Year One.

CMS Leadership Turnover

CMS also went through leadership transitions during the 2012-13 school year. Prior to the start of LIFT's planning year (2011-12), the former Superintendent, Dr. Peter Gorman, announced his departure. He had been heavily involved in the initial LIFT planning and design stages, having served on the CMS Investment Study Group committee that worked on identifying sustainable and replicable models for closing the achievement gap and increasing graduation rates in CMS. Dr. Gorman served as CMS Superintendent for five years and was often credited for boosting academic achievement, increasing graduation rates, and working to close the achievement gap in CMS. After Dr. Gorman's departure, and during LIFT's planning year, Hugh Hattabaugh served as the Interim Superintendent while a national search was conducted to bring in Dr. Gorman's replacement. Dr. Heath Morrison was hired in July 2012, just prior to the start of Year One of Project LIFT. In this context, LIFT leadership embarked on the implementation of a highly complex initiative with CMS leaders who were less familiar with the LIFT design and planning process.

LIFT Zone Changes

There were additional changes specific to the LIFT zone leading up to the start of the initiative. By design, many LIFT schools experienced principal and teacher turnover, a decrease in teacher experience levels, and an increase in student enrollments. These changes are described below.

1. Principal Experience and Placement

The initial roll-out of the Project LIFT Initiative created a tremendous amount of change in the LIFT schools and for school leaders, teachers and their students. Many of the LIFT principals were relatively new to their schools leading up to the initiative. Most LIFT principals were strategically placed in these schools through the CMS Strategic Staffing initiative, which seeks to place dynamic, high-performing leaders in challenging school settings.[16] These principals brought with them teams of new staff members that were equally challenged to adapt to the new school setting. These principals also faced considerable challenges related to new grade configurations for some LIFT schools[17], staff turnover, and an overall reduction in the number of experienced teachers in LIFT schools. Over the course of Year One, expanding enrollments at all LIFT schools added additional pressure on LIFT school leaders and staff to continue to meet the needs of growing student populations.

2. Teacher Turnover & Experience

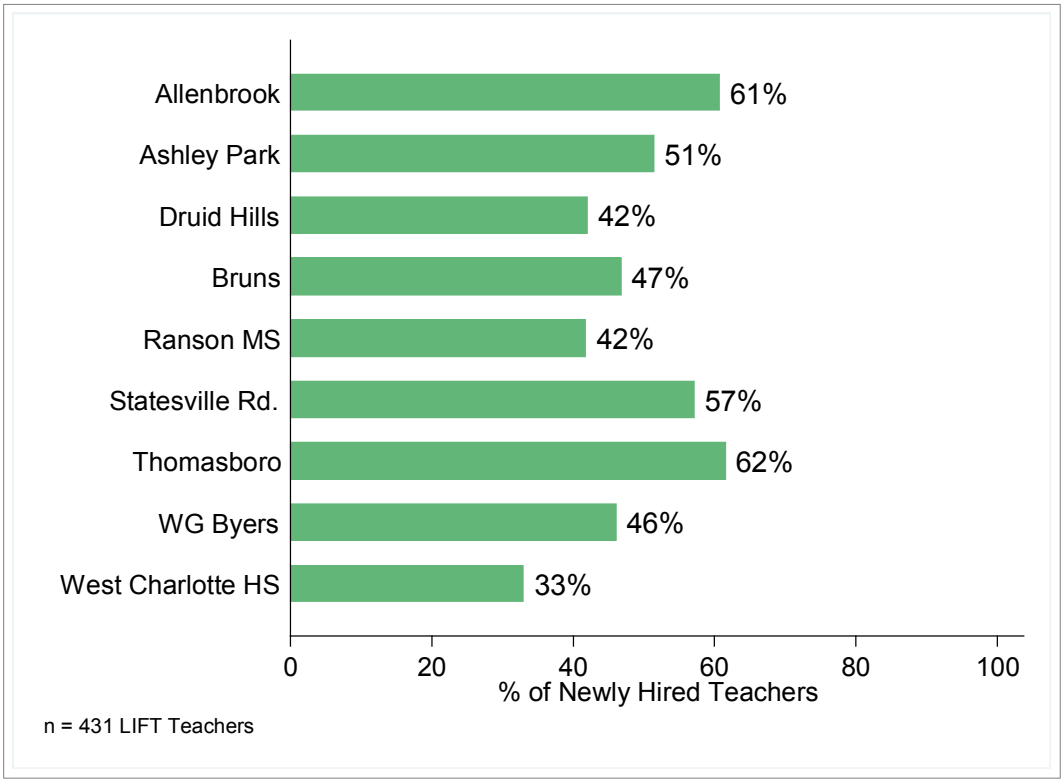
A key strategy of the Project LIFT Initiative is to recruit, support, and retain talented teachers who were aligned with the LIFT mission. Prior to the start of the 2012-13 school year, principals at LIFT schools were given the authority to displace existing teachers with teachers selected from a national talent pool cultivated by the LIFT staff. In addition, teachers at LIFT schools were given the option to voluntarily transfer to another CMS school prior to the start of the initiation. Coming into the 2012-13 school year,

[16] The CMS strategic staffing policy allows principals to assemble teams that could include one assistant principal, a literacy facilitator, a behavior management technician, and up to five teachers with proven success. Principals could not only bring a new team in, but they were given some latitude in "pruning" existing school staff. Each principal could have as many as five teachers removed from the school's staff.
[17] Ashley Park Elementary, Bruns Academy, Druid Hills Academy, Thomasboro Academy, & Walter G. Byers School were converted from a K-5 to a Pre-K-8 school model during the 2011-12 school year.

over 100 teachers at LIFT schools were strategically replaced by mission-aligned staff, while other teachers were provided with the opportunity to request a voluntary transfer within CMS; in total, approximately 275 new teachers, comprising over 60% of all teachers at LIFT schools, were newly hired immediately prior to, or during, Year One.

Figure 2 presents the percentage of teachers at LIFT schools who were new to their schools in 2012-13, the first year of the LIFT Initiative.

Figure 2. Percentage of LIFT Teachers Newly Hired for the 2012-13 School Year



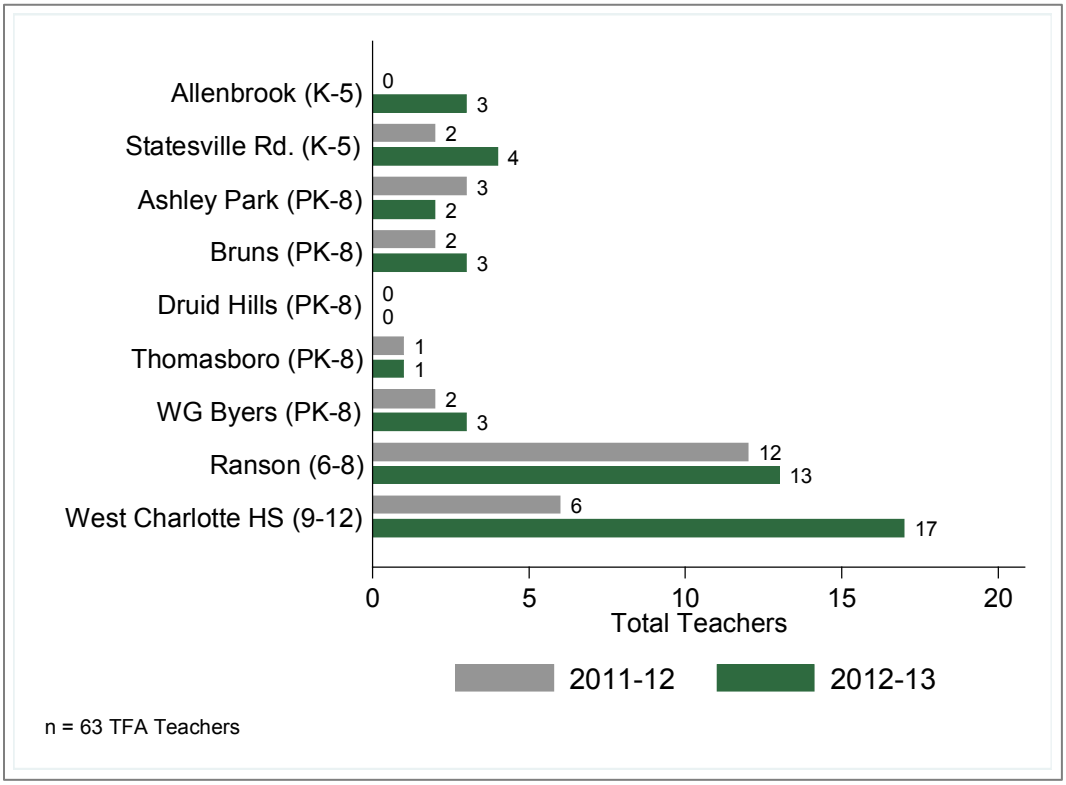
Key Findings:

- LIFT schools newly hired between 33% and 62% of their teaching staffs in the lead up to Year One of the initiative.
- In all LIFT elementary/middle schools, over 40% of the teaching staff were newly hired in 2012-13.
  - At Allenbrook (61%) and Thomasboro (62%) over 60% of the teaching staff were newly hired in 2012-13.
- Roughly a third (33%) of West Charlotte High School teachers were newly hired in 2012-13.

To meet the challenges associated with filling the large number of teacher vacancies at LIFT schools prior to the 2012-13 school year, Project LIFT worked with a number of partner organizations to recruit

teachers.[18] A key talent partner in the first year of the initiative was Teach for America (TFA), providing 63 teachers, or roughly 23% of the teaching vacancies, in LIFT schools at the start of Year One. Figure 3 presents the total number of active TFA teachers teaching in LIFT schools in 2011-12 (gray) and 2012-13 (green).[19]

Figure 3. Total Active Teach for America Teachers in LIFT Schools: 2011-12 and 2012-13



Key Findings:

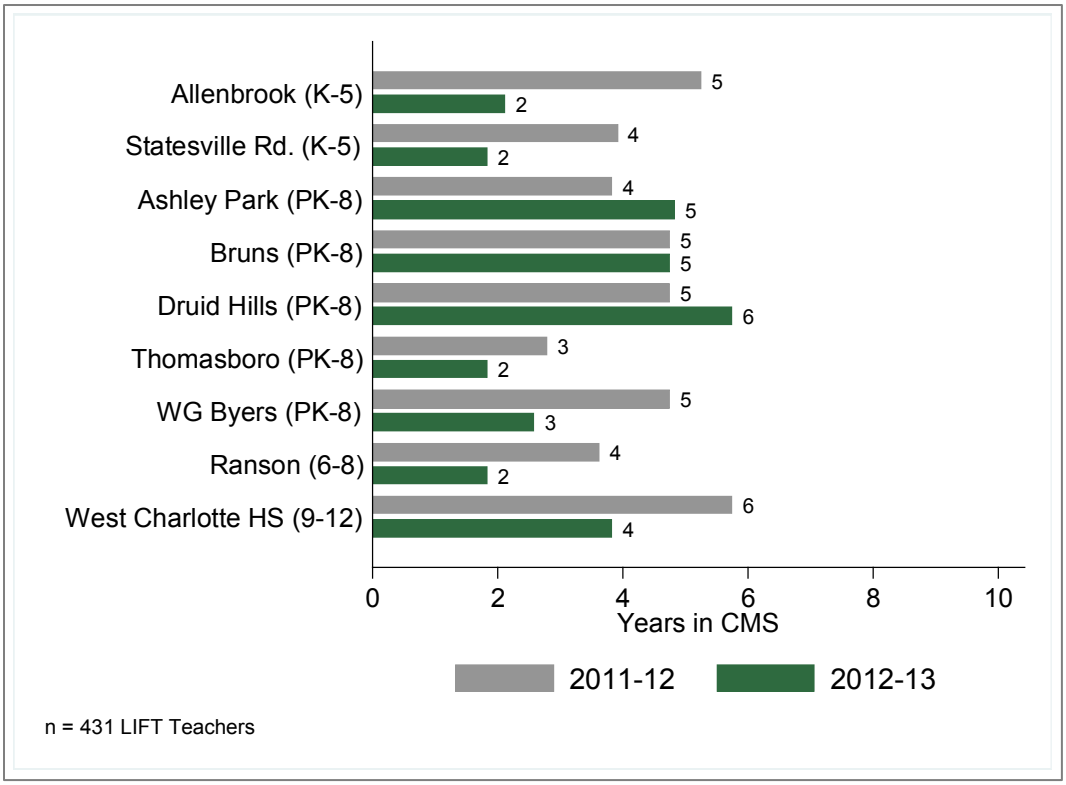
- The majority of TFA teachers were placed at Ranson Middle School and West Charlotte High School in 2012-13.
  - At Ranson Middle School, the 13 TFA teachers accounted for 24% of the 55 total teachers at Ranson in 2012-13.[20]
  - At West Charlotte High School the number of active TFA teachers nearly tripled, from 6 teachers in 2011-12 to 17 in 2012-13, accounting for 15% of the 115 total teachers at West Charlotte in 2012-13.[21]
- At all but one LIFT school (Ashley Park) the number of active TFA teachers in their schools either increased or stayed the same in 2012-13.

[18] See Implementation Memo for additional Talent Partners in Year One of the Initiative
[19] TFA teachers make a two year commitment to their schools. All TFA teachers represented in Figure 2 are 'active', meaning they were in their first or second year of service at their respective LIFT schools.
[20] See Appendix IV
[21] See Appendix IV

– The overall number, and percentage, of TFA teachers in all LIFT K-5 and PK-8 schools was relatively low in 2011-12 and 2012-13[22]

One consequence of the considerable teacher turnover at LIFT schools in Year One was a reduction in overall teacher experience at LIFT schools. Figure 4 presents the median years of experience in CMS of teachers at LIFT schools in 2011-12 (gray) and 2012-13 (green).

Figure 4. Median Years of Experience in CMS for LIFT Teachers: 2011-12 and 2012-13



Key Findings:

- At a majority of LIFT schools, the median years of experience in CMS for LIFT teachers either declined or stayed the same in 2012-13.
  - The median years of experience in CMS increased at Druid Hills and Ashley Park in 2012-13.
- At more than half of LIFT schools (5 of 9 schools), the median years of experience in CMS for teachers was 3 years or less in 2012-13.

By design, more than half of the teaching staff in LIFT schools turned over prior to Year One of the initiative. To fill these vacancies, LIFT staff and principals identified and hired teachers who were considered highly talented and whose values aligned with the goals of Project LIFT. Incorporating these

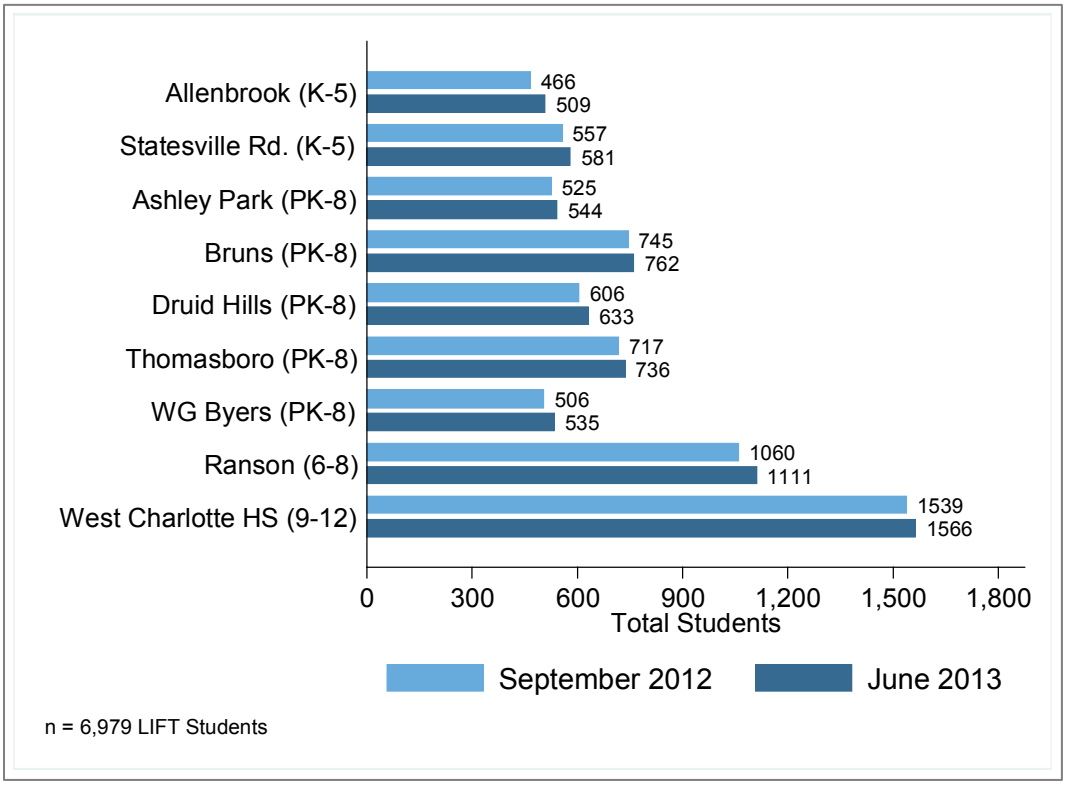
[22] See Appendix IV

new teachers, getting them acclimated to the day-to-day activities in their schools and aligning their pedagogical practices with the priorities of the LIFT initiative presented considerable challenges for the LIFT staff and principals in Year One of the initiative.

3. Student Enrollment

All LIFT schools experienced expanding enrollments during Year One. Figure 5 presents the change in student enrollments at LIFT schools during the first year of the initiative: enrollments in September 2012 (light blue) and June 2013 (dark blue).

Figure 5. Total Enrolled Students at LIFT Schools: Fall 2012 and End of Year 2013



Key Findings:

- Overall, LIFT school enrollment increased by 256 students during its first year of implementation.
- Enrollment increased in every LIFT school over the course of the 2012-13 school year.
  - At Allenbrook and Ranson, student enrollment expanded by roughly 50 students over the course the year.

The increasing enrollments at LIFT schools are another indication of the challenges facing LIFT principals and teachers in Year One of the initiative.[23] New students often need additional supports from their teachers and school staff to adjust to their new schools, both academically and culturally.[24]

In sum, there were a range of contextual factors that influenced Year One implementation, and these will provide an historical reference point for future years of the evaluation. The following section provides a brief overview of our Year One qualitative implementation findings.

Overview of Year 1 Qualitative Implementation Findings

In the Preliminary Implementation Memo of August 2013, we identify both key successes and challenges across each of the four focus areas: *Talent*, *Time*, *Technology*, and *Parent and Community Support*. We also provide formative feedback by identifying important underlying conditions related to the successes and challenges that LIFT encountered in its first year of implementation in each of the four focus areas.

We found that implementation of Project LIFT during Year One was largely shaped by the opportunities and challenges associated with simultaneously planning and implementing a complex initiative with a diverse range of stakeholders. In the planning year leading up to Year One, [25] and throughout the first year of the initiative, Project LIFT leadership was charged with a complex array of tasks. These included:

- Identifying key short-term goals within each focus area that would serve as progress benchmarks toward meeting the initiative's long-term goals;
- Developing strategies to meet these Year One progress benchmarks;
- Building internal LIFT staff capacity to implement the strategies through partnerships with local organizations and service providers;
- Working closely with partners to operationalize Year One LIFT strategies and provide implementation guidance through formal quarterly partner meetings and informal communication; and,
- Developing communication strategies to help multiple audiences and stakeholders understand the opportunities available to them as a result of LIFT and to secure and maintain stakeholder buy-in to the initiative.

Early Implementation Successes

Year One of the initiative included a number of important **implementation successes** across the four focus areas that provided a strong foundation for the initiative leading into Year Two. The most notable successes are highlighted in Table 1 below.

[23] Interviews with LIFT principals will provide insight into the relationship between student mobility, enrollment fluctuations and the climate at LIFT schools.
[24] Tobell & O'Donnell, 2013
[25] 2011-12 was the planning year for Project LIFT; RFA did not begin its external evaluation activities until summer 2012.

Table 1. Preliminary Implementation Successes

TALENT
• LIFT schools were fully staffed with mission-aligned principals and teachers. • LIFT principals coalesced into a supportive professional learning community.
TIME
• Instructional time was extended through partnerships with OST providers. • New academic calendars for 2013-14 were established at four LIFT schools.
TECHNOLOGY
• New technologies were integrated to support principals, teachers and students to improve their performance.
PARENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
• Innovative parent and community engagement strategies began to show promising results.

Early Implementation Challenges

Project LIFT also faced a number of **challenges** during Year One that continue to impact implementation. We found that these challenges were often related, either directly or indirectly, to limited financial and staff capacity. As a result, LIFT leadership had to prioritize their efforts and strategically deploy resources towards achieving a limited set of goals. Table 2 provides examples of capacity-related challenges that LIFT experienced during Year One implementation.

Table 2. Year One Implementation Challenges

TALENT
• There were limited supports for Teach for America (TFA) corps members in LIFT schools. • LIFT staff experienced turnover and vacancies throughout Year One.
TIME
• Limited funding prevented the adoption of Continuous Learning Calendars at all schools requesting these new calendars. • Standards for quality afterschool programs were not established, limiting guidance for partnership development. • There was limited capacity to secure quality pre-school options for all four-year-old students in the LIFT zone. • Credit recovery needs of WCHS students exceeded the capacity of the LIFT Academy.

TECHNOLOGY

- LIFT delayed the roll out of the OLPC program, limiting the integration of the new technology into teaching and instruction in Year One
- LIFT schools did not have the infrastructure to support new technologies.

PARENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- LIFT staffing to support parent and community engagement was insufficient until mid-year.
- LIFT staff and partners had limited capacity to meet the socio-emotional needs of LIFT students.

Although LIFT experienced some successes worth noting, it is clear the initiative was still being developed and refined over the course of Year One. Our analyses of implementation in Year Two will document how key strategies evolve and how key adjustments are made by LIFT staff to meet the challenges identified in Year One.

Section I Summary

The LIFT initiative operates within dynamic state and local contexts. Unanticipated changes in leadership at the local level and in the state assessment system strongly influenced the roll-out of the LIFT initiative in Year One. For example, LIFT implementation was impacted by significant district-level leadership changes; school-level staffing changes (principal replacements, teacher turnover, reductions in levels of teacher experience); and expanding student enrollments. As LIFT schools had historically struggled with leadership and staffing stability, change during Year One of LIFT implementation presented challenges to school leaders and teachers in their efforts to engage high-need students. In addition, the alignment of North Carolina's state-standardized tests with the CCSS led to substantial declines in proficiency scores for students across all school levels and subjects. These declines in the LIFT schools expanded the distance between students' baseline scores and LIFT's five-year proficiency goals.

Despite all of these shifts, LIFT implemented a number of strategies that were perceived as effective in engaging students and their families, such as One Laptop Per Child (OLPC), the Microsoft Digital Inclusion Program, and multiple parent and community engagement strategies (like the Pulse).[26] LIFT also succeeded in securing a major state policy change by gaining approval to adopt the Continuous Learning Calendars (CLCs) in some schools during Year Two. As of the writing of this report, LIFT leadership is continuing to assess and refine strategies currently underway in Year Two.

[26] See Implementation Memo for further detail related to LIFT strategies.

Section II. Year 1 Student Outcomes: School Climate

A primary goal of the initiative in Year One was the promotion of a school culture that would create the conditions to support rapid academic gains in later years of the initiative. LIFT staff and principals were keenly aware that students' social and emotional needs had to be met in order to create the school and classroom conditions necessary for teachers to effectively deliver rigorous instruction. (For more detail, see our September 2013 Implementation Memo in Appendix V). While LIFT staff and principals actively pursued strategies to enhance teaching and learning in LIFT classrooms in Year One, LIFT leadership agreed that a positive school culture that promotes active engagement in learning needs to be in place before LIFT schools could be expected to make dramatic academic progress.

This section presents key indicators of school climate during Year One of the initiative: attendance and behavior outcomes for all students, and Early Warning Indicators (EWIs) of school dropout for first time 9th grade students at West Charlotte High School. For each set of outcomes we first present changes at LIFT schools from the 2011-12 school year to 2012-13, followed by the results of a matched comparison between LIFT students and the set of comparison students identified for the evaluation.

Methodological Note: Student Matching

The main analyses to assess the effect of the Project LIFT initiative on student performance rely on comparisons between LIFT students and a comparison group of similar students at non-LIFT schools in CMS. The selection of the comparison group of students consisted of a ***two-stage matching process*** that first matched each LIFT school to a set of similar comparison schools, and then matched LIFT students to similar students from the non-LIFT comparison schools.[27]

Each LIFT student in grades 3–9 who attended a LIFT school for at least 90 days of the 2012-13 school year was matched to the *three* most similar students based on the following indicators from the 2011-12 school year:

- Grade Level
- Age
- Gender
- Race/Ethnicity
- Limited English Proficiency Status
- English as a Second Language Status
- Special Education Status
- Gifted Student Status
- EOG Reading Scaled Score
- EOG Math Scaled Score
- Days Enrolled
- Attendance Rate
- Total Schools Attended
- Out-of-school Suspensions
- In-school Suspensions
- Disciplinary Incidents

This matching procedure successfully matched 99% of LIFT students in grades 3–9 with a set of comparison students who attended schools that were as similar as possible to the LIFT schools. This comparison group of students will provide a reference for assessing the performance of LIFT students throughout the remaining years of the external evaluation.

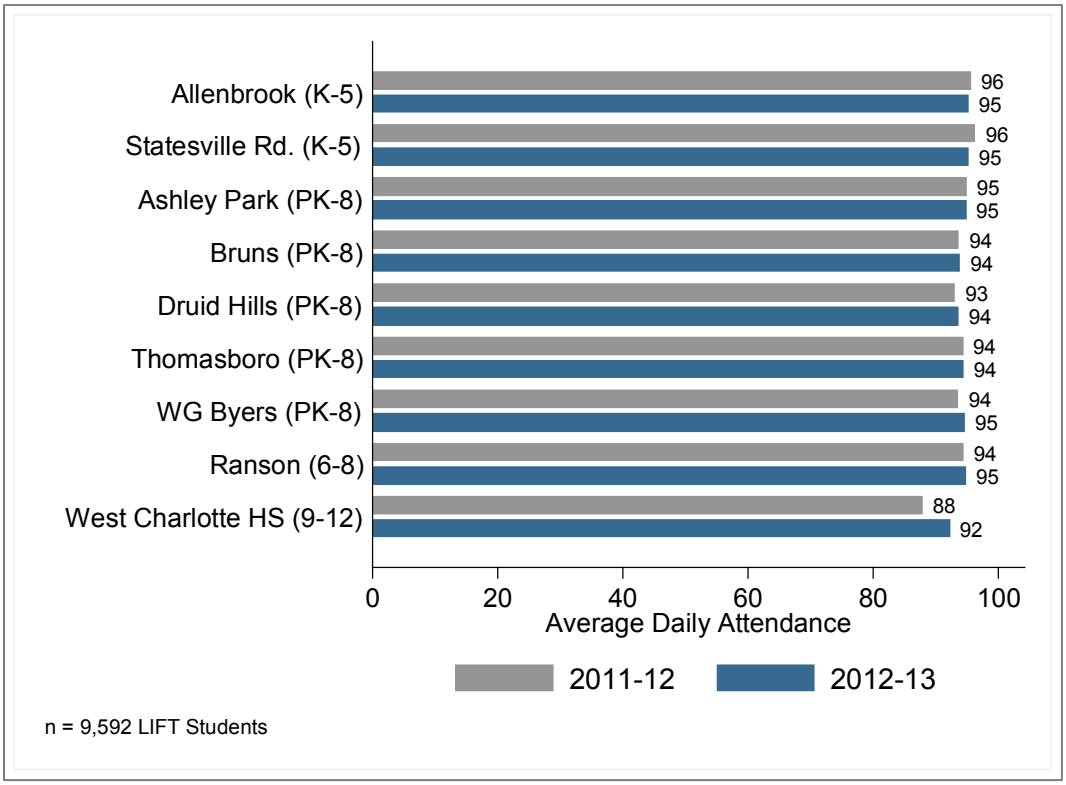
[27] See Appendix I for a detailed description of the matching process.

Climate at LIFT Schools - Attendance

Average Daily Attendance at LIFT Schools

Figure 6 presents the average daily attendance (ADA) at LIFT schools for the 2011-12 (gray) and 2012-13 (blue) school years.

Figure 6. Average Daily Attendance at LIFT Schools: 2011-12 & 2012-13



Key Findings:

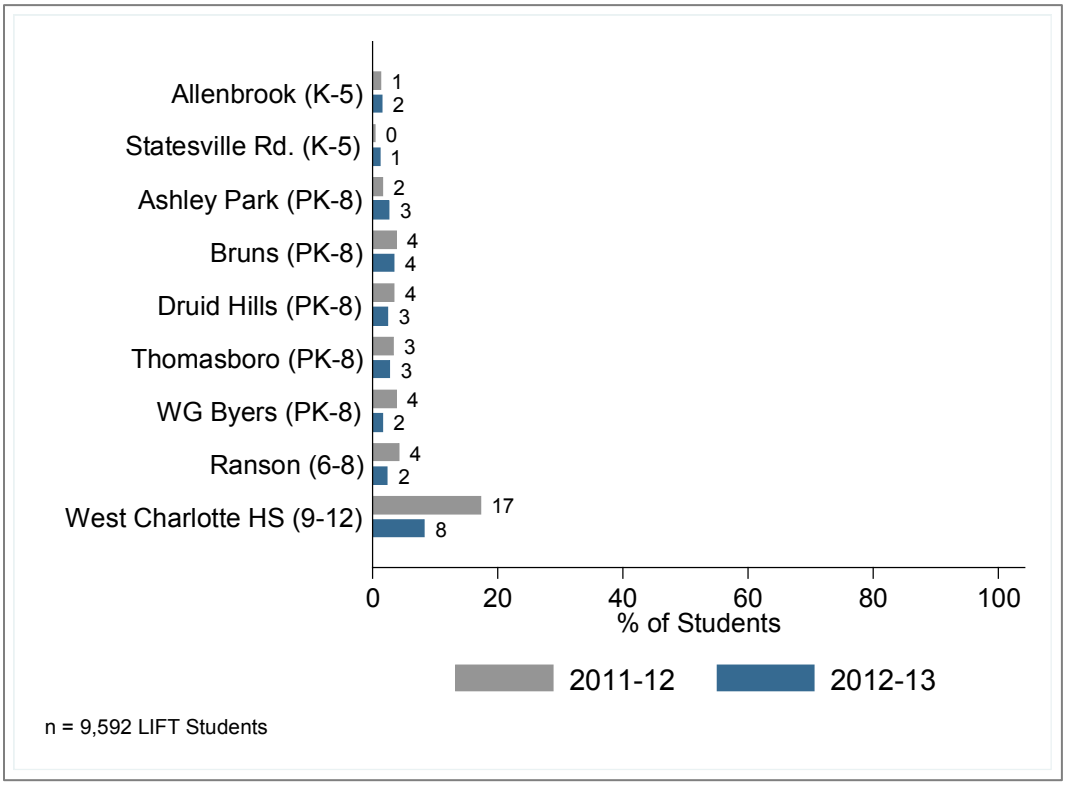
- ADA was above 90% across the LIFT Zone.
- ADA at West Charlotte High School increased from 88% in 2012-13 to 92% in 2012-13.

Students with Low Attendance Rates at LIFT Schools

Relatively few students at LIFT schools had attendance problems in Year One. Figure 7 presents the percentage of students with attendance rates below 80% during the 2011-12 and 2012-13 school year.[28]

[28] Previous studies have identified attendance below 80% as an Early Warning Indicator (EWI) for dropout, making this a critical threshold for students across the LIFT Zone (Neild and Balfanz 2006).

Figure 7. Percentage of Students with ADA below 80% at LIFT Schools: 2011-12 and 2012-13



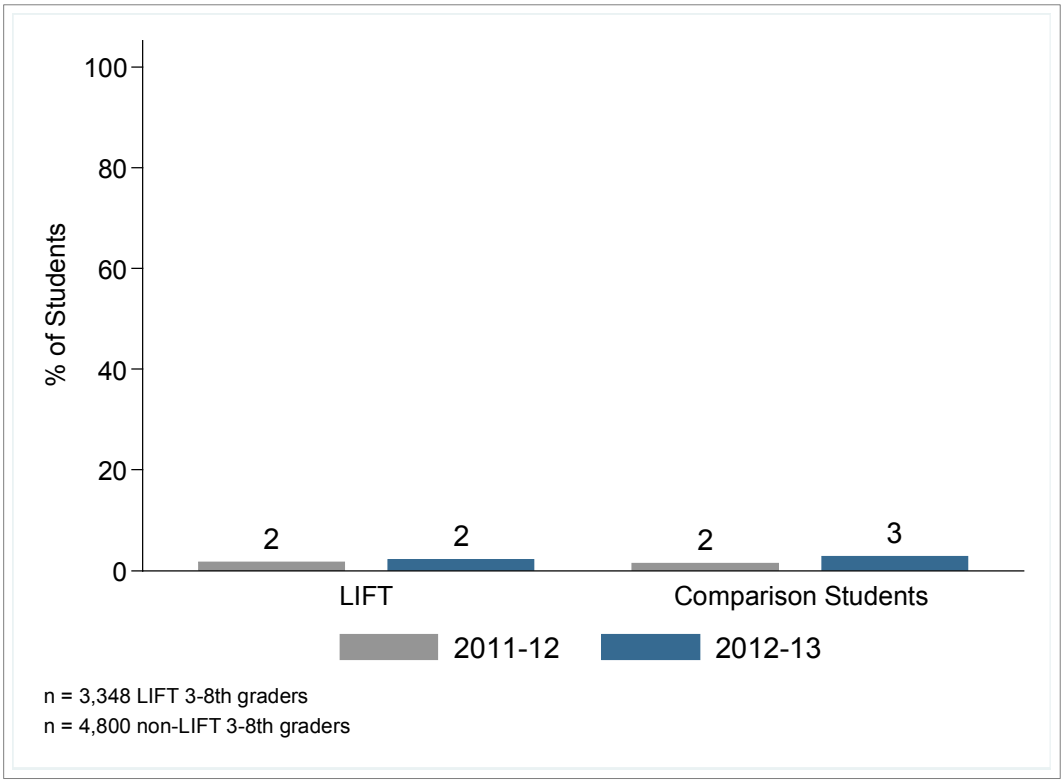
Key Findings:

- At all LIFT schools, the percentage of students with attendance rates below 80% either declined or remained roughly the same from 2011-12 to 2012-13.
- There were notable reductions in the percentage of students with attendance rates below 80% at West Charlotte High School, dropping from 17% in 2011-12 to 8% in 2012-13.

Students with Low Attendance: LIFT Students versus Comparison Students

In Year One of the initiative, LIFT students' attendance was comparable to that of the matched comparison group of students. Figure 8 presents a comparison between the percentage of LIFT students and the comparison students who finished the 2012-13 school year with an attendance rate below 80%.

Figure 8. Percentage of Students with ADA below 80%: LIFT Students versus Comparison Students



Key Findings:

- When comparing attendance rates that fell below 80%, there was no significant difference between the LIFT students and the comparison students.

Climate at LIFT Schools - Suspensions

Reducing Out of School Suspensions (OSS) was another key tactic to improve the climate at LIFT schools. Overall, LIFT schools' progress on improving climate was mixed. The total number of out-of-school suspensions issued and the number of students receiving an out-of-school suspension provide another indication of how the climate at LIFT schools began to change in Year One of the initiative.

Out of School Suspensions and Students Suspended at LIFT Elementary/Middle Schools

Figures 9 and 10 present the total number of OSS issued at LIFT elementary/middle schools and the total number of students receiving OSS in the 2011-12 (gray) and 2012-13 (blue) school years.[29]

[29] See Appendix IV for summary tables of the percentage of students at LIFT schools who received an OSS in 2011-12 and 2012-13 and the number of OSS issued per school day at LIFT schools in 2011-12 and 2012-13.

Figure 9. Total OSS at LIFT Elementary/Middle Schools: 2011-12 and 2012-13

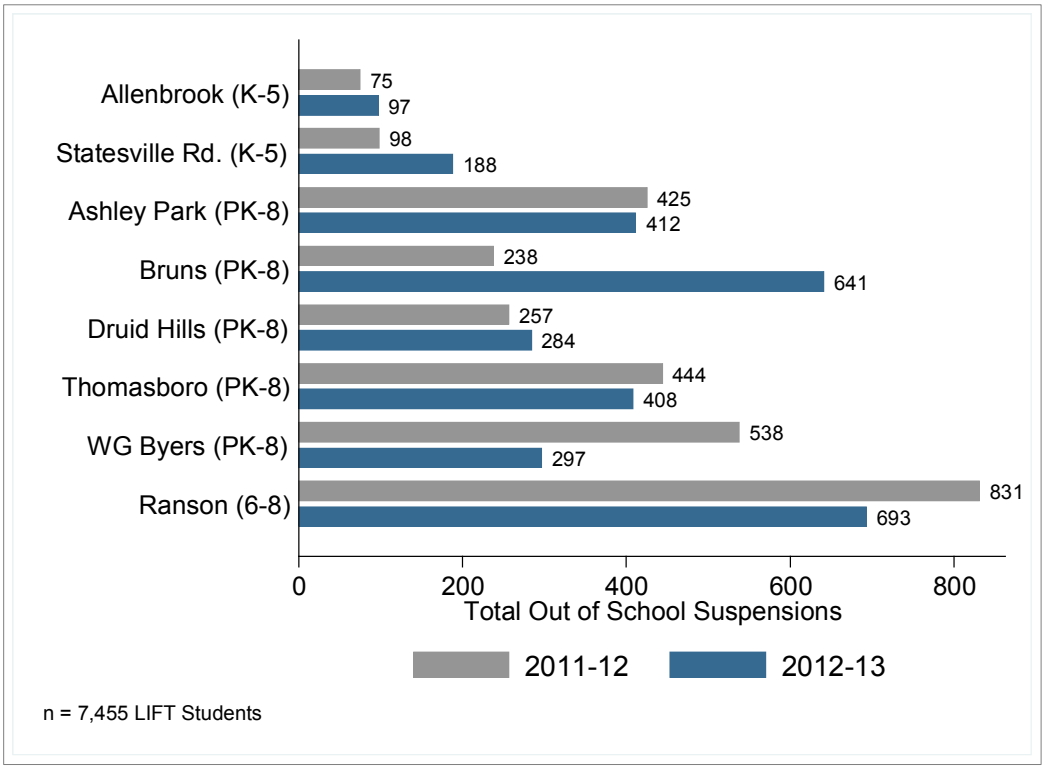
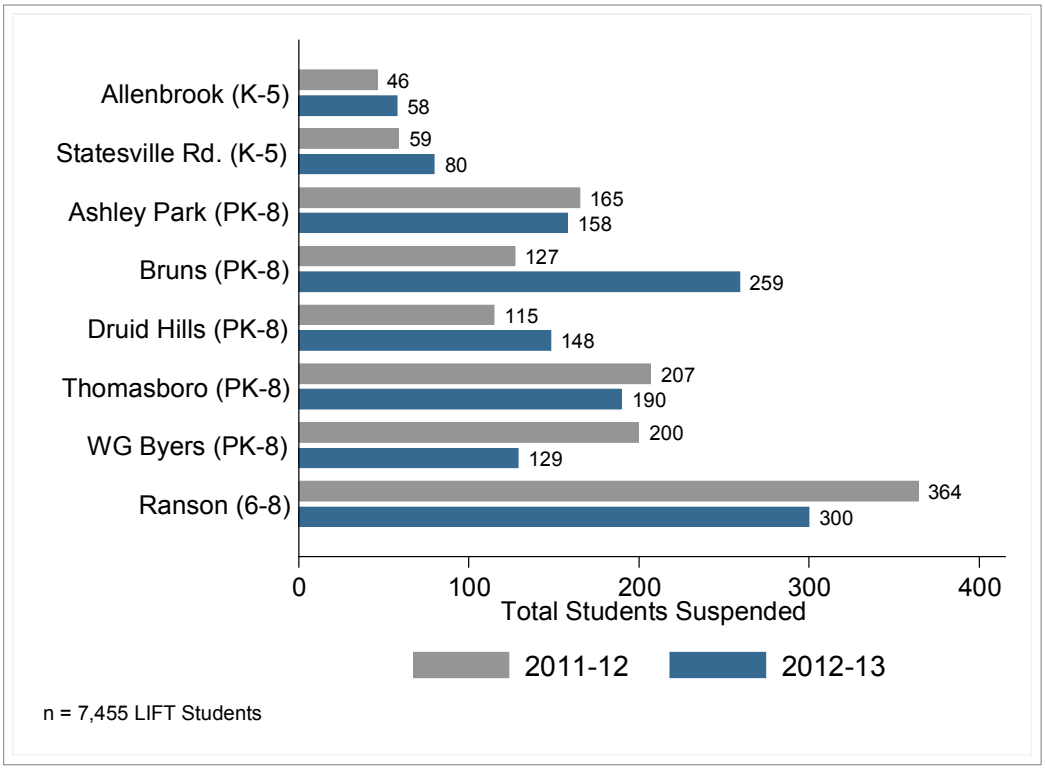


Figure 10. Total Students Suspended at LIFT Elementary/Middle Schools: 2011-12 and 2012-13



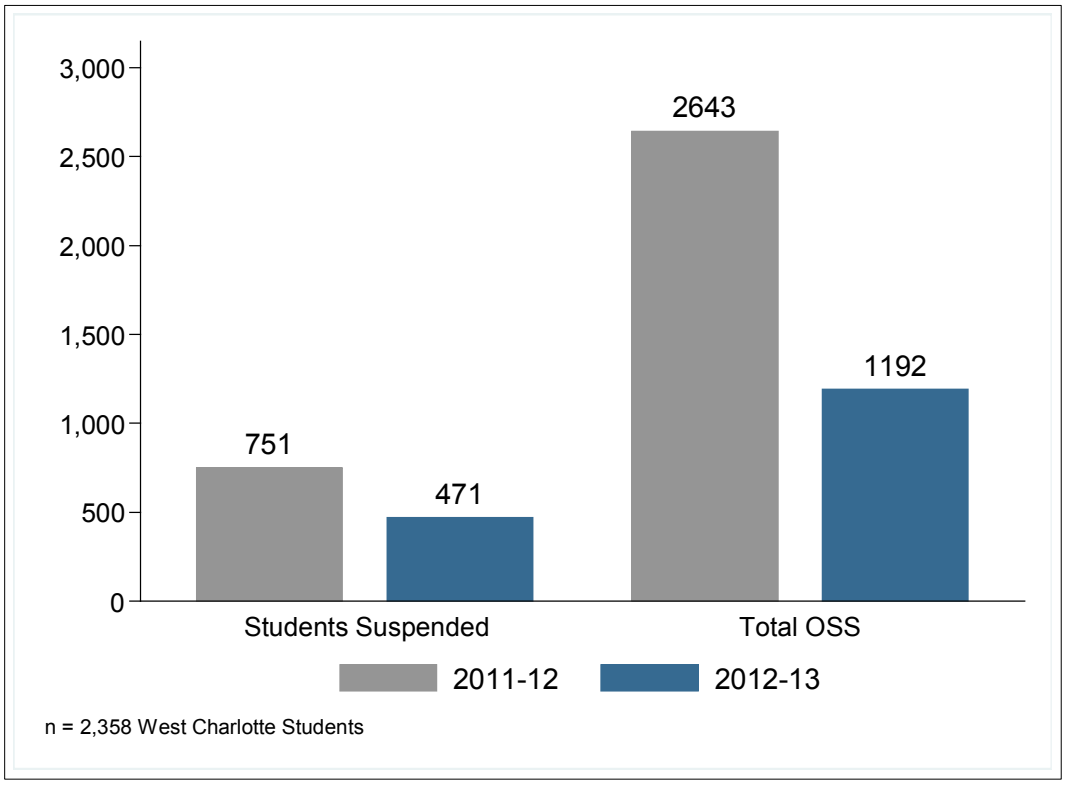
Key Findings:

- At half of LIFT elementary/middle schools the number of OSSs issued and the overall number of students with OSSs declined in 2012-13.
  - The largest reductions were seen at Walter G. Byers and Ranson Middle Schools.
- At Bruns Academy there were substantial increases in the overall number of OSSs issued and students receiving OSSs in 2012-13.[30]
  - Statesville Road also experienced a substantial increase in the overall number of OSSs issued in 2012-13.

Out of School Suspensions and Students Suspended at West Charlotte High School

West Charlotte High School considerably reduced both types of suspensions in Year One. Figure 11 presents the total number of OSS issued (light blue) and total number of students suspended (dark blue) at West Charlotte High School compared to the average number of OSS issued and students suspended at the comparison high schools in 2011-12 and 2012-13.

Figure 11. Total OSS and Total Students Suspended at West Charlotte High School: 2011-12 and 2012-13



[30] Based on our analyses to date, the Bruns student body has very high socio-emotional needs. Also, the Bruns principal's short tenure was affected by constant changes. In 2011-12, the principal's second year in his role, the school changed from K-5 to PK-8; in 2012. Project LIFT began adding additional layers of responsibility to an already challenging situation. The Bruns principal was replaced after the 2012-13 school year. RFA will explore these suspension findings further during our spring interviews with LIFT principals.

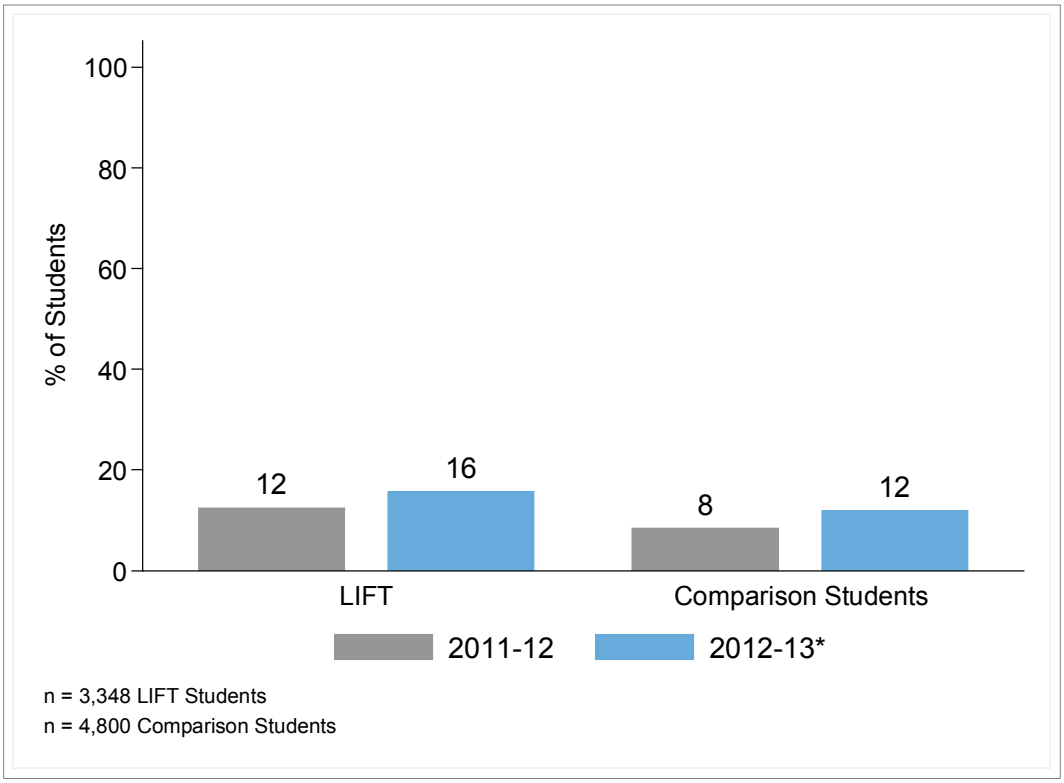
Key Findings:

- At West Charlotte High School, the total number of OSS issued and students suspended declined steeply in 2012-13.

Elementary/Middle Students with Multiple Suspensions: LIFT Students versus Comparison Students

Despite some of the improvements observed in Figures 10 and 11, multiple suspensions remained a challenge in Year One. Figure 12 presents a comparison between the LIFT students and the matched comparison students who finished the 2012-13 school year with two or more OSS.[31]

Figure 12. Matched Comparison: Percentage of Students with Multiple Out of School Suspensions



** Group differences between LIFT and Comparison Students in 2012-13 are statistically significant (p<.05)*

Key Findings:

- A significantly greater percentage of LIFT elementary/middle students (16% v. 12%) received multiple OSS in 2012-13 than the comparison groups of students.

[31] Multiple OSS has been identified by previous studies as another Early Warning Indicator (EWI) for school-dropout, making this another critical intermediate outcome for students across the LIFT Zone (Neild and Balfanz, 2006). RFA will further explore these suspension findings further during our spring interviews with LIFT principals.

Early Warning Indicators for First Time 9th Graders at West Charlotte High School

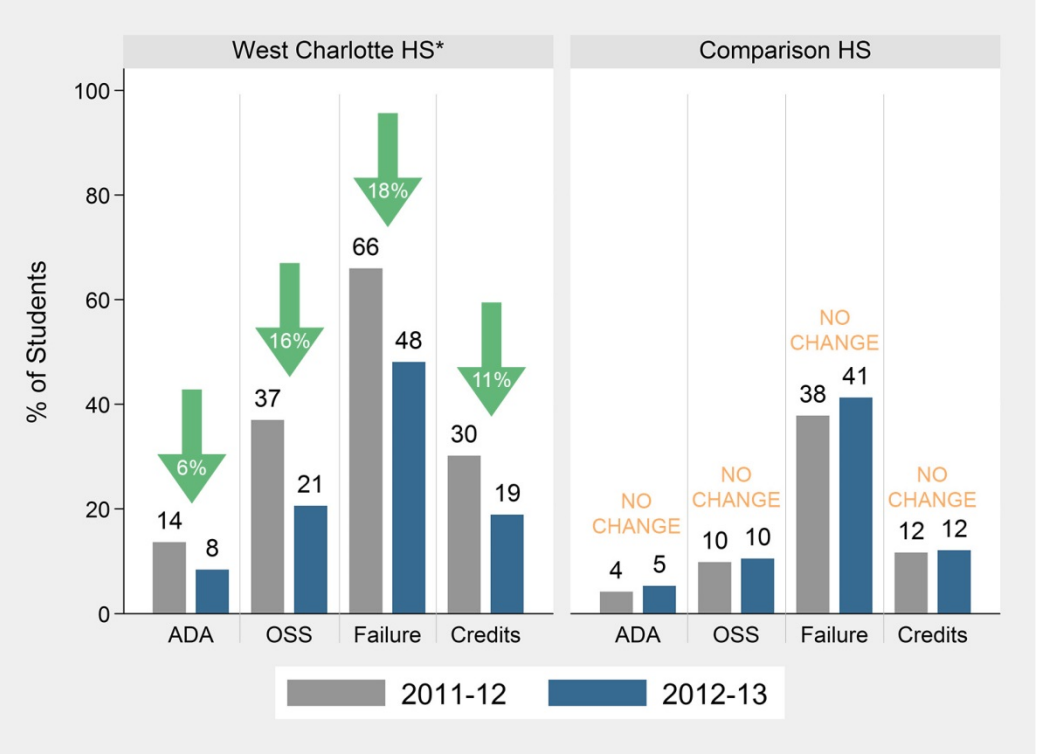
West Charlotte High School is the focal point of the initiative, and the 2012-13 9th grade cohort represents the first cohort whose entire high school experience will take place during the LIFT initiative. Understanding how this cohort compares to prior West Charlotte 9th grade cohorts and the matched comparison group provides a reference point for assessing progress in Year One of the initiative.[32]

EWI Accumulation

Figure 13 presents the percentage of first time 9th grade students at West Charlotte High School and at the comparison high schools that accumulated the Early Warning Indicators (EWI) of school dropout in 2011-12 (gray) and 2012-13 (blue).[33]

EWIs			
ADA: Attendance Rate below 80%	**OSS:** Multiple Out of School Suspensions	**Failure:** Failure to earn all credits attempted	**Credits:** Earning 3 or Fewer Credits

Figure 13. Early Warning Indicators for 1st Time 9th Grade Students: 2011-12 and 2012-13



WCHS =
411 2011 9th Graders;
418 2012 9th Graders
Non-LIFT =
1,775 2011 9th Graders;
1,839 2012 9th Graders

[32] The first time 9th grade students at West Charlotte High School are roughly equivalent to the comparison group of students selected for this study. However, there are considerable school level differences in the student populations, graduation rates, attendance rates, behavior, and academic performance between West Charlotte High School and the comparison high schools (See Appendix I). For this reason, we do not assess the significance of the differences between the West Charlotte High School student and the matched comparison students in the Year One analyses, rather the Comparison High Schools simply serve as a reference point for West Charlotte High school students. In future years of the evaluation additional years of data will provide a way to mitigate some of the school level differences observed between West Charlotte High School and the Comparison High Schools.

[33] Each of the EWIs presented in Figure 12 have been identified in previous studies as significant predictors of high school dropout (Neild and Balfanz, 2006)

Key Findings:

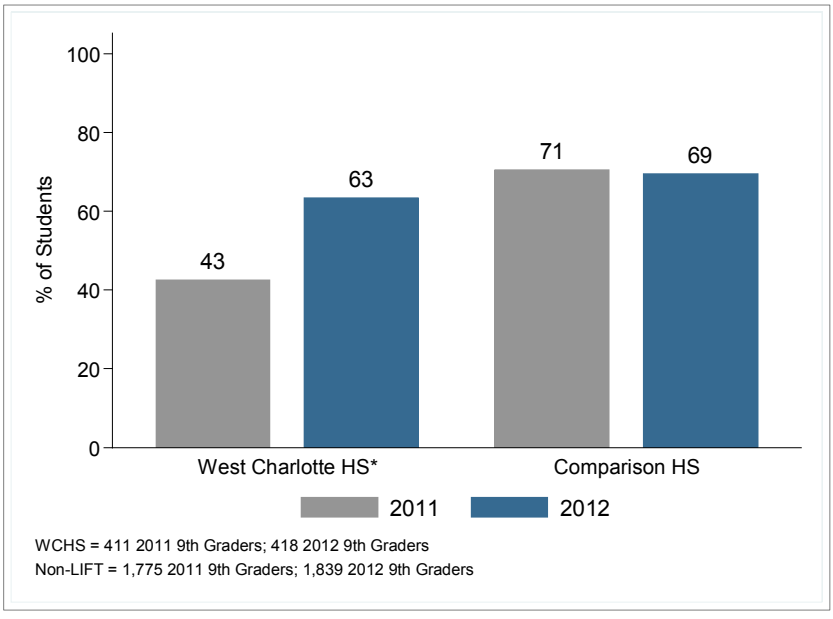
- First time 9th Graders at West Charlotte High School in 2012-13 finished the school year at *lower* risk than first time 9th graders from 2011-12. Specifically, compared to first time 9th graders in 2011-12, significantly fewer first time 9th graders in 2012-13 finished the school year with:
  - ADA below 80% (8% v. 14%)
  - Multiple OSS (21% v. 37%)
  - A Failed Course (48% v. 66%)
  - 3 Credits or Fewer (19% v. 30%)
- At the comparison high schools, there were no significant changes in the EWIs accumulated by first time 9th graders from 2011-12 to 2012-13.

Overall, fewer first time 9th graders at the comparison high schools accumulated EWIs in 2012-13, but there were no significant changes in the overall risk profiles of 9th graders from the previous year. By comparison, the significant reductions in the EWI accumulation of the 2012-13 9th grade cohort at West Charlotte High School provide promising signs for the Year One of the initiative.

On-Track to Graduation

The percentage of first time 9th graders at West Charlotte High School who finished the school year on-track to graduation increased dramatically in Year One of the initiative. Figure 14 below presents the percentage of first time 9th grade students at West Charlotte High School and the comparison high schools who finished 2011-12 and 2012-13 with at least 7 credits.[34]

Figure 14. On-Track 1st Time 9th Graders at West Charlotte High School: 2011-12 and 2012-13



[34] Twenty-eight (28) credits are required for graduation in CMS, making the accumulation of 7 credits in students' first year an initial indicator that students are on-track to graduate. (http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/cmsdepartments/scs/Pages/GraduationInformation.aspx)

** The year to year difference at West Charlotte High School is statistically significant (p<.05)*

Key Findings:

- A significantly greater percentage of first time 9th graders in 2012-13 (63%) than in 2011-12 (43%) finished their first year in high school with at least 7 credits.
- There was no significant change in the percentage of on-track first time 9th graders at the comparison schools from 2011-12 to 2012-13.

Summary of Findings: School Climate

The findings presented in this section suggest that Project LIFT schools are showing positive changes on key indicators of school climate in Year One of the initiative. These positive changes align with the LIFT Theory of Change (see Introduction). Moreover, each of these outcomes (attendance, out of school suspensions, and Early Warning Indicators of school dropout) has been identified as a key driver of longer term academic success.[35] Table 3 presents summary performance of the LIFT schools along these key climate measures in Year One.

Table 3. LIFT School Climate Measures in Year One

LIFT Schools	Average Daily Attendance Above 90% in 2012-13	OSS Reductions	EWI Reductions Incoming 9th Grade Cohort	On-Track to Graduation Increases for Incoming 9th Grade Cohort
Allenbrook (K-5)	✓		N/A	N/A
Statesville Rd (K-5)	✓		N/A	N/A
Ashley Park (PK-8)	✓	✓	N/A	N/A
Bruns (PK-8)	✓		N/A	N/A
Druid Hills (PK-8)	✓		N/A	N/A
Thomasboro (PK-8)	✓	✓	N/A	N/A
W.G. Byers (PK-8)	✓	✓	N/A	N/A
Ranson MS (6-8)	✓	✓	N/A	N/A
West Charlotte HS (9-12)	✓	✓	✓	✓

[35] Mac Iver, 2013

Across the LIFT Zone, student attendance was very high in Year One and, with a couple of notable exceptions, most of the LIFT elementary/middle schools' suspensions either declined or remained roughly constant in Year One. At West Charlotte High School, dramatic reductions in suspensions, significant reductions in the risk profiles of the incoming 9th grade cohort, and significant increases in the percentage of this cohort on-track to graduate after Year One are promising signs for the initiative moving into Year Two.

Section III: Year 1 Student Outcomes: Student Proficiency Rates

This section presents LIFT and comparison students' proficiency on each End-of-Grade (EOG) assessment and LIFT students' proficiency on the End-of-Course (EOC) assessments for the 2012-13 school year. No comparison groups are presented for the EOC assessments in Year One since the vast majority of students taking the English II and Biology assessments were not first time 9th grade students. LIFT student proficiency levels are also presented *by school* for each EOG assessment.

As seen in the LIFT Theory of Change (see Introduction), immediate gains in student academic proficiency are not expected in the early years of the initiative. In addition, changing assessments in North Carolina created additional challenges for all schools in the state, CMS and the LIFT Zone (see below).

Changing Assessments in NC: Context and Implications

In 2012-13 the North Carolina End-of Grade[36] (EOG) and End-of-Course[37] (EOC) state standardized tests were revamped by North Carolina's Department of Public Instruction to align with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). This adjustment represents a major shift in North Carolina's statewide student assessment system and created considerable challenges for LIFT schools, their teachers and students. State and district-wide declines in proficiency levels across all EOG and EOC assessments in the 2012-13 school year highlight the challenges facing school leaders and teachers throughout North Carolina and CMS as they align their teaching and instruction with the Common Core State Standards.[38]

Due to the realignment of the EOG and EOC assessments in 2012-13, it was not possible to assess student growth from 2011-12 to 2012-13. Likewise, year-to-year comparisons of proficiency rates are also very difficult to interpret in Year One of the initiative. Given these challenges, the Year One evaluation simply presents 2012-13 proficiency levels on the EOG and EOC assessments; future years of the external evaluation will provide opportunities to assess student growth on these assessments.

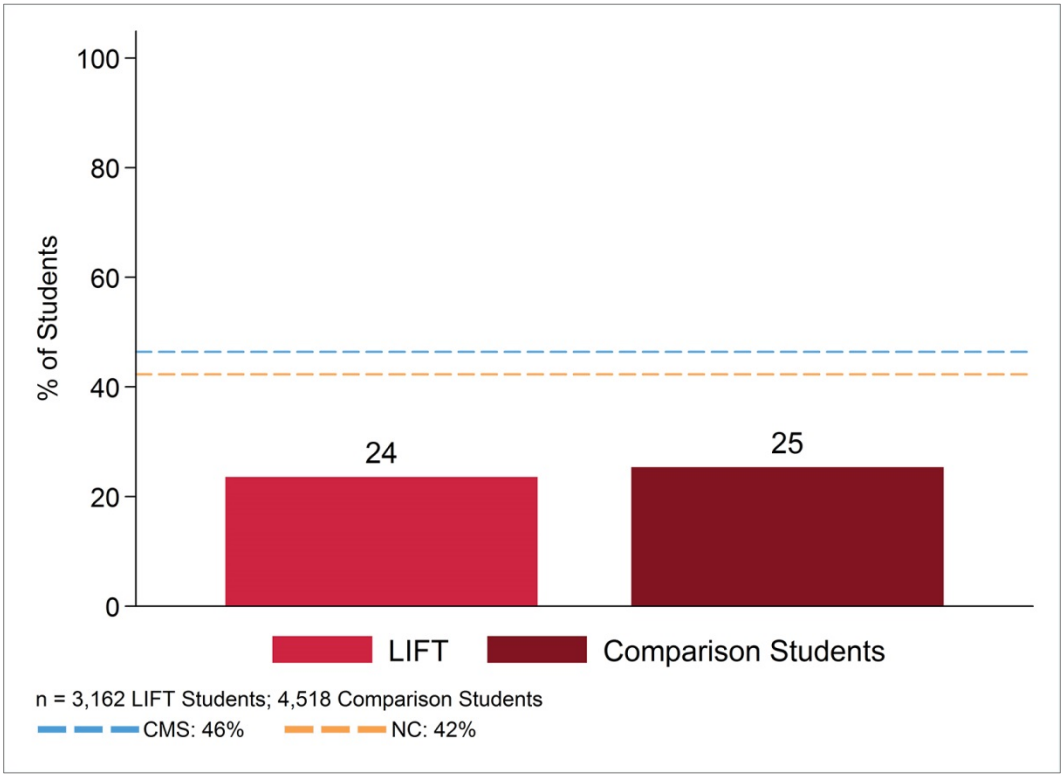
[36] End-of-Grade assessments occur in grades 3-8 for Math and Reading and grades 5 and 8 for Science.
[37] End-of-Course assessments occur in grades 9-12 for the following courses: Math 1, English 2, and Biology.
[38] See Appendix for changes in EOG and EOC proficiency levels across the state, CMS and in other urban districts in NC.

Math EOG Proficiency

Math EOG Proficiency: LIFT Students versus Comparison Students

Figure 15 presents the percentage of LIFT students and comparison students in grades 3 – 8 who scored proficient or above on the Math EOG assessment. The horizontal blue line represents the percentage of all CMS students in grades 3 – 8, and the yellow line represents all NC students in grades 3 – 8, who scored proficient or above on the Math EOG assessment in 2012-13.

Figure 15. Proficiency Levels on Math EOG - LIFT Students versus Comparison Students: Grades 3 – 8



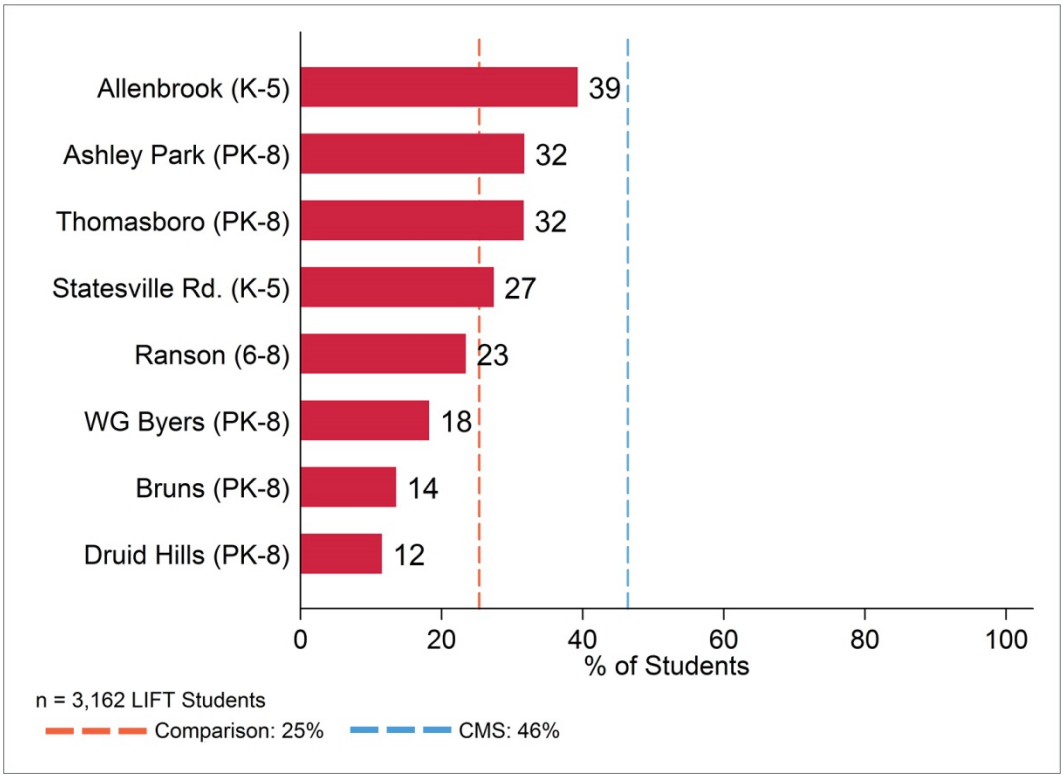
Key Findings:

- The percentage of LIFT students (24%) and comparison students (25%) scoring proficient or above in math was roughly equivalent in 2012-13.
- The proficiency levels of both the LIFT students and the comparison students were well below district (46%) and state levels (42%).

Math EOG Proficiency by LIFT School

Figure 16 presents the percentage of LIFT students who scored proficient or above on the Math EOG assessment for each LIFT elementary/middle school in 2012-13. The orange line represents the percentage of comparison students, and the blue line represents the percentage of CMS students in grades 3 – 8, who scored proficient or above on the Math EOG assessment in 2012-13.

Figure 16. Proficiency Levels on Math EOG by LIFT School



Key Findings:

- In half of LIFT schools, a greater percentage of students scored proficient or above than did the comparison students. These schools included:
  - Allenbrook, Ashley Park, Thomasboro, and Statesville Rd.
- LIFT students in both K-5 schools were among those who outperformed the comparison group of students.[39]
- The proficiency levels of all LIFT schools were well below the CMS proficiency level for the Math EOG.

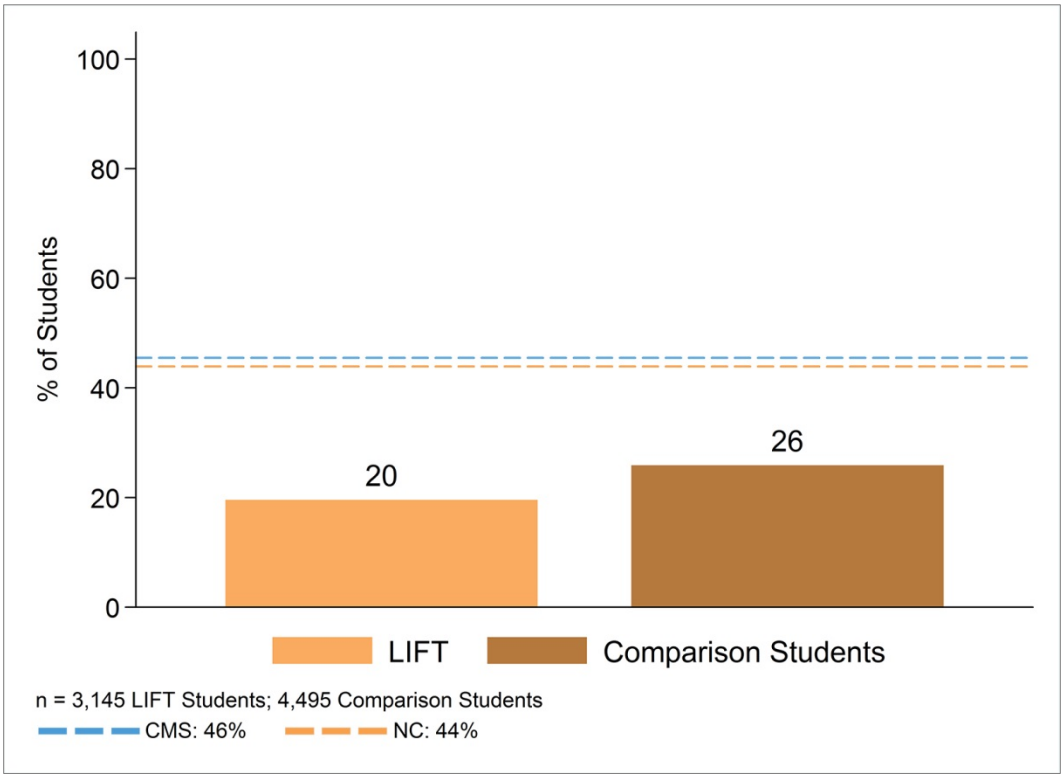
Reading EOG Proficiency

Reading EOG Proficiency: LIFT Students versus Comparison Students

Figure 17 presents the percentage of LIFT students and comparison students in grades 3 – 8 who scored proficient or above on the Reading EOG assessment. The blue line represents the percentage of all CMS students in grades 3 – 8, and the yellow line represents all NC students in grades 3 – 8, who scored proficient or above on the Reading EOG assessment in 2012-13.

[39] This variation is likely due to the overall higher proficiency levels among students in grades 3 – 5 than students in grades 6 – 8 (see Appendix III)

Figure 17. Proficiency Levels on Reading EOG - LIFT Students versus Comparison Students: Grades 3 – 8*



** Group difference between LIFT and Comparison Students were statistically significant (p<.05)*

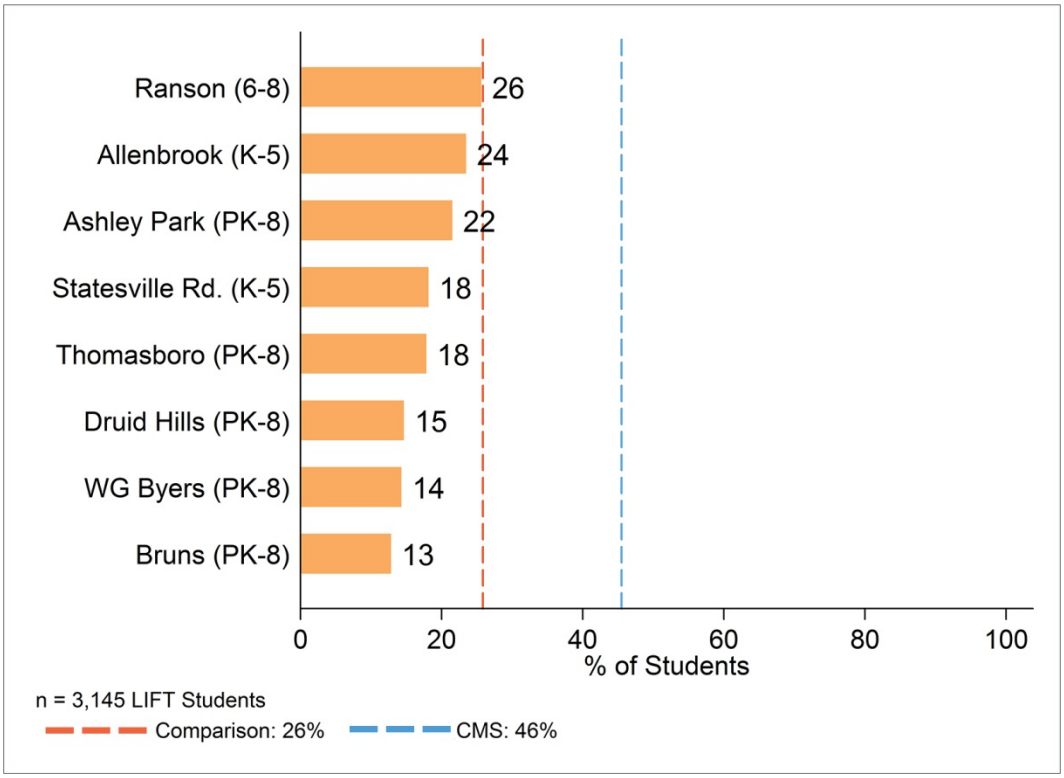
Key Findings:

- The percentage of LIFT students (20%) scoring proficient or above on the Reading EOG was significantly lower than that of the comparison students (26%).
- The proficiency levels of both the LIFT students and the comparison students were well below district (46%) and state levels (44%).

Reading EOG Proficiency by LIFT School

Figure 18 presents the percentage of LIFT students who scored proficient or above on the Reading EOG assessment for each LIFT elementary/middle school in 2012-13. The orange line represents the percentage of comparison students, and the blue line represents the percentage of CMS students in grades 3 – 8, who scored proficient or above on the Reading EOG assessment in 2012-13.

Figure 18. Proficiency Levels on Reading EOG by LIFT School



Key Findings:

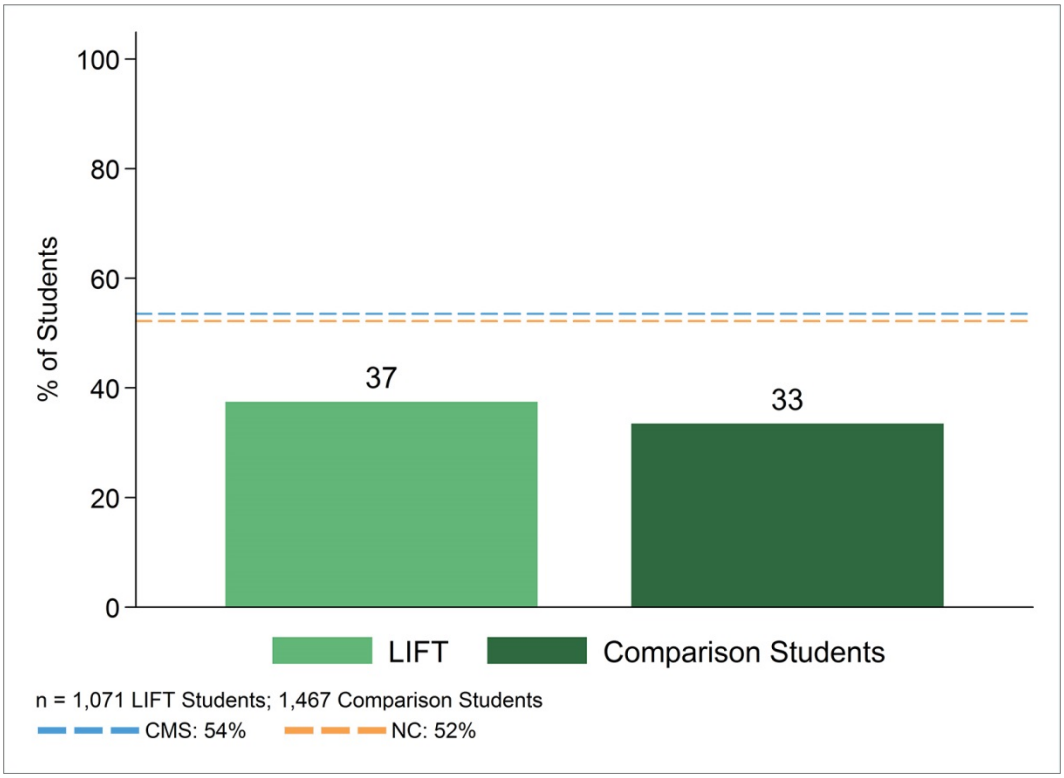
- In all LIFT schools, a lower percentage of students scored proficient or above than did the comparison students.
- Students in both LIFT K-5 schools were among the top half of LIFT schools in Reading proficiency.
- The proficiency levels of all LIFT schools were well below the CMS proficiency level for the Reading EOG.

Science EOG Proficiency

Science EOG Proficiency: LIFT Students v. Comparison Students

Figure 19 presents the percentage of LIFT students and comparison students in grades 5 and 8 who scored proficient or above on the Science EOG assessment. The blue line represents the percentage of all CMS students in grades 5 and 8, and the yellow line represents all NC students in grades 5 and 8, who scored proficient or above on the Science EOG assessment in 2012-13.

Figure 19. Proficiency Levels on Science EOG - LIFT Students versus Comparison Students: Grades 3 – 8



** Group difference between LIFT and Comparison Students were statistically significant (p<.05)*

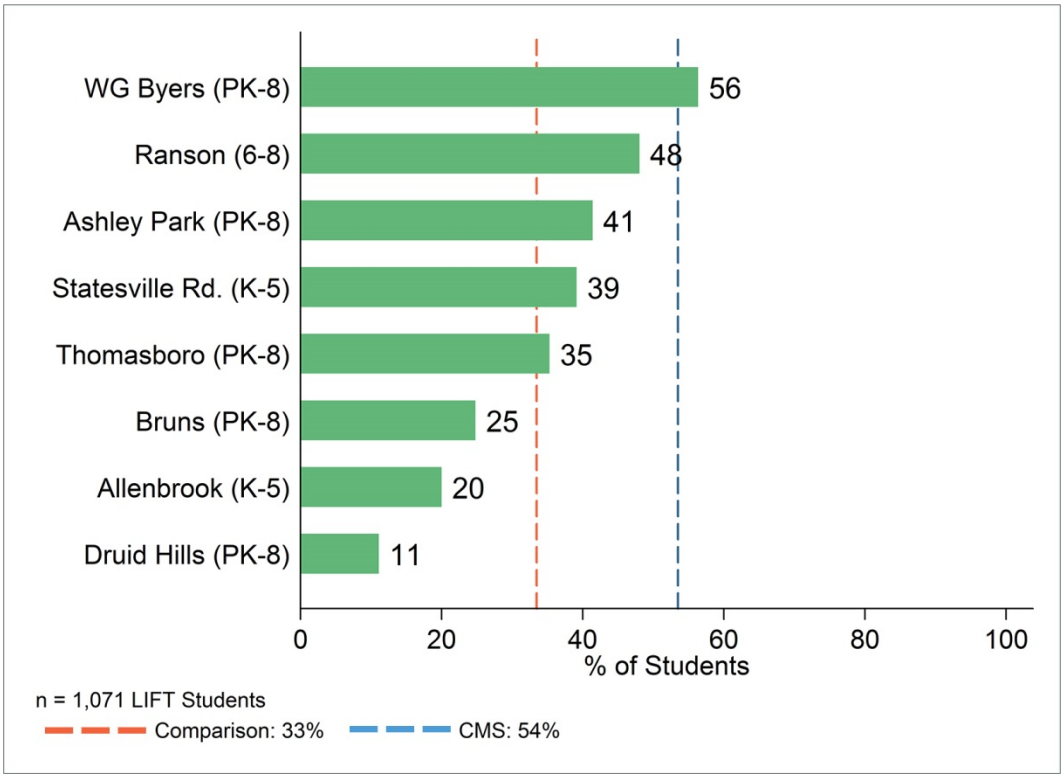
Key Findings:

- The percentage of LIFT students (37%) scoring proficient or above on the Science EOG was significantly higher than that of the comparison students (33%).
- The proficiency levels of both the LIFT students and the comparison students were well below district (54%) and state levels (52%).

Science EOG Proficiency by LIFT School

Figure 20 presents the percentage of LIFT students who scored proficient or above on the Science EOG assessment for each LIFT elementary/middle school in 2012-13. The orange line represents the percentage of comparison students, and the blue line represents the percentage of CMS students in grades 3 – 8, who scored proficient or above on the Science EOG assessment in 2012-13.

Figure 20. Proficiency Levels on Science EOG by LIFT School



Key Findings:

- In a majority of LIFT schools, a greater percentage of students scored proficient or above on the Science EOG than did the comparison students.
- The proficiency level of students at Walter G. Byers (56%) exceeded the CMS proficiency level for the Science EOG.
- There was no clear pattern in the proficiency levels of LIFT students across different grade configurations on the Science EOG.[40]

EOC High School Assessments

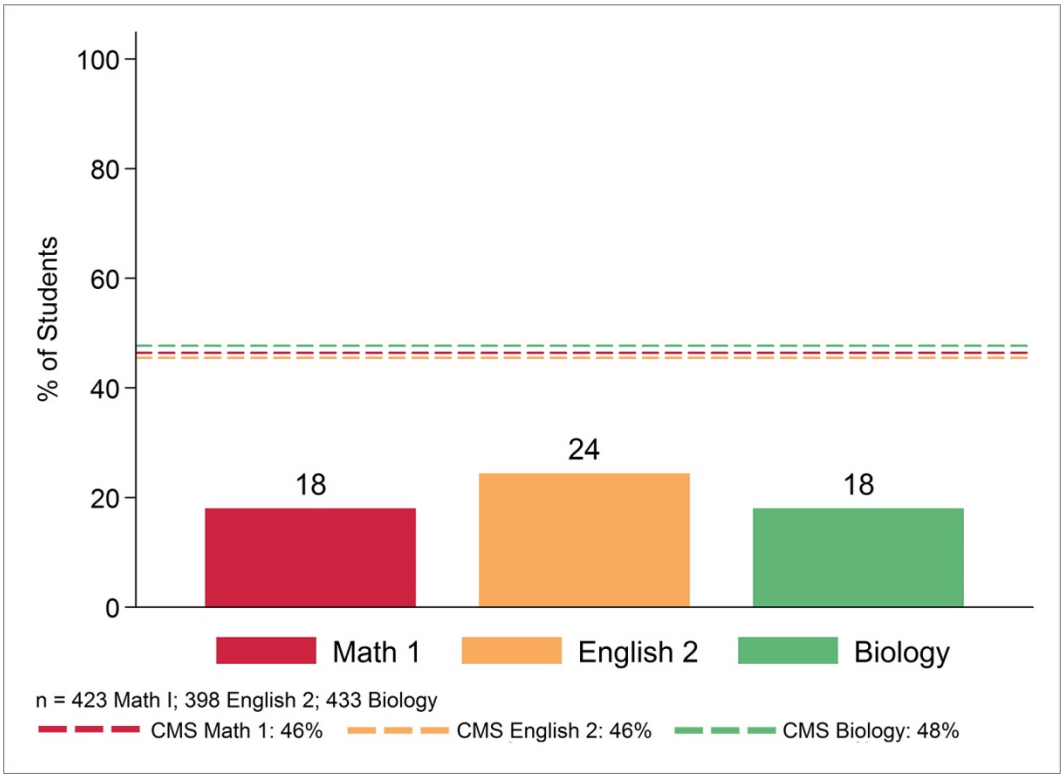
EOC Proficiency Rates for West Charlotte High School Students

Figure 21 presents the percentage of West Charlotte High School students who scored proficient or above on the Math I (red) [41], English II (yellow), and Biology (green) EOC assessments in 2012-13.[42]

[40] The percentage of 8th grade LIFT students scoring proficient or above (47%) on the Science EOG was significantly higher than that of the comparison group (39%) and of LIFT 5th grade students (26%). (See Appendix III for more detail.)
[41] In 2012-13 82 LIFT 8th grade students from Bruns and Ranson took the Math I EOC, accounting for 19% of all LIFT students who took the Math EOC in Year One.
[42] There is no comparison group included for the EOC assessments since the vast majority of the matched first time 9th graders from West Charlotte HS and the comparison high schools did not take the English II or the Biology assessments. Later years of the evaluation will present these comparative results after both groups of students take each of the EOC assessments.

The dotted lines represent the percentage of CMS students who scored proficient or above on each assessment.[43]

Figure 21. LIFT Student Proficiency: Math I, English II, and Biology EOCs



Key Findings:

- The percentages of LIFT students scoring proficient or above on the Math I (18%), English II (24%), and Biology (18%) assessments were well below CMS proficiency rates for each assessment.

Summary of Findings: Student Academic Proficiency

Unsurprisingly, LIFT students' performance on the EOG and EOC assessments in Year One did not mirror the improvements observed in the LIFT school climates. As seen in the LIFT Theory of Change (see Introduction), climate improvements should precede improvements in academic performance, which are not expected until later years of initiative. Student proficiency on all EOGs and EOCs were well below CMS District averages in Year One.

Table 4 provides a summary of the percentage of students scoring proficient or above on each of the EOG and EOC Assessments at each LIFT school in 2012-13.

[43] The proficiency levels reported in Figure XX represent state-reported proficiency levels and were not independently assessed using the matched comparison group of West Charlotte HS first time 9th grade students. Matched comparisons of EOC performance for LIFT students will be conducted in later years of the external evaluation when a greater percentage of WCHS 1st time 9th grade students take each of the EOC assessments. (http://accrpt.ncpublicschools.org/app/2013/disag/)

Table 4. Percentage of Students Proficient on EOG and EOC Assessments at LIFT Schools: 2012-13

	End of Grade Assessments		
LIFT Schools	Math	Reading	Science (Grade 5 & 8)
LIFT Elementary/Middle Students (3-8)	24%	20%*	37%*
Comparison Students (3-8)	25%	26%*	33%*
CMS District (3-8)	46%	46%	54%
Allenbrook (K-5)	39%	24%	20%
Statesville Rd (K-5)	27%	18%	39%
Ashley Park (PK-8)	32%	22%	41%
Bruns (PK-8)	14%	13%	25%
Druid Hills (PK-8)	12%	15%	11%
Thomasboro (PK-8)	32%	18%	35%
W.G. Byers (PK-8)	18%	14%	56%
Ranson (6-8)	23%	26%	48%
	End of Course Assessments		
	Math I	English II	Biology
West Charlotte HS (9-12)	18%	24%	18%
CMS District (9-12)	46%	46%	48%

** Group difference between LIFT and Comparison Students were statistically significant (p<.05)*

While proficiency levels were low across the LIFT Zone, there was considerable variation across the LIFT elementary/middle schools' proficiency levels on the EOG assessments. Both K-5 elementary schools - Allenbrook and Statesville Road - were in the top half of LIFT schools on the Math and Reading EOGs. Ashley Park was in the top half of schools on each of the EOGs. In addition, students at Walter G. Byers exceeded the CMS proficiency rate on the Science EOG. On the other hand, Bruns and Druid Hills were among the bottom three LIFT schools on each of the EOGs.

In Year Two of the initiative, LIFT staff have worked to strengthen implementation in a number of key areas. In the next section, we highlight some promising refinements to key LIFT strategies in Year Two of the initiative.

Section IV: Summary of Year I Report and Preview of Year II

The first year of the Project LIFT initiative created tremendous change throughout the nine schools in the LIFT zone. Implementation across the LIFT schools involved considerable turnover of the teaching staff, ongoing support and professional development of teachers in LIFT schools, the expansion of instructional time through partnerships with OST providers and changes to the academic calendar, the introduction of a range of new technology to support teaching and learning, and expanded efforts to connect LIFT schools with their local communities (See Implementation Memo in Appendix V). At the same time, CMS was undergoing leadership changes while North Carolina was rolling out new End-of-Grade and End-of-Course assessments that were first administered in Spring 2013. The combination of these multi-layered changes taking place at the state, district, zone and school levels during the first year of the Project LIFT Initiative created challenging conditions within the LIFT schools for principals, teachers, and students.

Despite these challenges, the findings presented in this Year One report offer promising signs along with some ongoing challenges for the initiative moving forward.[44] We highlight the most important of these below.

Promising Signs for Year One

In Year One of the initiative, many of the LIFT schools made strides in establishing a school climate that aligns with the LIFT Theory of Change (see Introduction). Establishing a positive school climate in the early years of the initiative is a necessary condition for the significant academic achievement goals of the initiative.

At all the LIFT schools, student attendance was very high in Year One of the initiative and only a small number of LIFT students had serious attendance issues. In addition, a majority of LIFT schools either maintained or reduced the number of out of school suspensions they issued and the number of students suspended in the first year of the initiative. In particular, there were dramatic reductions in the number of out of school suspensions issued and the number of students suspended at West Charlotte High School.

At West Charlotte High School, the incoming cohort of 9th grade students in Year One of the initiative completed their first year of high school at significantly lower risk than the cohort entering the previous year. Compared to the 9th grade cohort from 2011-12 at West Charlotte High School, significantly fewer students in the 2012-13 cohort had an attendance rate below 80%, received multiple out of school suspensions, failed a course, or earned 3 or fewer credits. In addition, a significantly greater percentage of the 2012-13 9th grade cohort finished the school year 'on-track' to graduation than West Charlotte students in the 2011-12 9th grade cohort.

Ongoing Challenges

Across each of the EOG and EOC assessments, LIFT student rates of proficiency were very low in Year One of the initiative. However, there was considerable variation in student proficiency across the LIFT elementary/middle schools on each of the EOG assessments. Bruns Academy and Druid Hills Academy

[44] See Implementation Memo in Appendix V for Promising Signs and Ongoing Challenges for Implementation in Year One of the initiative.

were consistently among the lowest performing schools, while Allenbrook Elementary was consistently among the top performing schools on each EOG assessment.

In addition, while many LIFT schools reduced the number of out of school suspensions they issued and the overall number of students suspended in their schools, roughly 1 in 4 LIFT students received at least one out of school suspension in Year One.

While the academic performance of LIFT students was well below the CMS district average, and well below LIFT goals, it is important to keep in mind that large complex initiatives like Project LIFT take time to be introduced, get established, and generate the desired results. As seen in the LIFT Theory of Change (see Introduction), the initial findings presented in this memo align with contemporary theories of the key elements and early outcomes associated with complex turnaround efforts in high poverty schools. The initial years of complex turnaround initiatives typically do not generate dramatic changes in student academic achievement. Rather, initial improvements in school climates and the cultivation of supports for students in turnaround schools like those seen in the LIFT schools in Year One help create the conditions for academic achievement gains in later years.

At this early stage in the initiative, the findings presented in this Year One report point to promising signs for the initiative moving forward, while also highlighting the challenges that lay ahead. Moving into future years of the initiative, the external evaluation will continue to track key elements of Project LIFT implementation and the student outcomes aligned with the initiative's long term goals.

Preview of Year II Analyses

As was the case in Year One of our evaluation, the Year Two evaluation will include analyses of LIFT implementation and student behavioral and academic performance. Throughout Year Two of the initiative the LIFT staff have made a number of key adjustments and refinements to the strategies identified in our Implementation Memo. In Winter 2013-14, RFA conducted in-depth interviews with all LIFT staff to better understand how Year Two implementation developed to address short and long term goals for the initiative.

Table 5 presents a summary of key practices that represent refinements and adjustments to Year Two implementation. Each set of practices is aligned to a LIFT strategy within each focus area (Time, Talent, Technology, Parent/Community Engagement). In addition, each set of practices is aligned to a set of leading indicators (**in bold)** that these practices are designed to influence.[45]

[45] Each of the practices presented in Table 5will be analyzed more thoroughly for the Year II Final Report, with additional data collected from interviews with LIFT principals that will be conducted in May/June 2014.

Table 5. Key Elements of LIFT Implementation in Year Two

Year Two Implementation Practices	Links to LIFT Leading Indicators
TALENT	
LIFT Strategy: Refine and Implement the "LIFT Way" at LIFT Schools[46]	
• LIFT staff encouraged principals and teachers to follow a five point data-driven instructional (DDI) approach to curriculum and instruction including: – Principal goal setting; – Half-day school visits from LIFT staff; – Discovery Education interim assessments; – Ongoing informal site visits from LIFT staff; and, – Scheduled data discussions between principals and teachers.	• Routine interim assessments may help teachers to better gauge student strengths and areas for intensive supports. The DDI approach may help teachers tailor instruction to improve student ***academic proficiency.***
LIFT Strategy: Adopt an Opportunity Culture at LIFT Schools	
• Across four LIFT Schools, nine multi-classroom leaders each work with 3-4 teachers to provide tailored coaching and support to strengthen teachers' instructional practice.	• Providing targeted supports to key teachers in LIFT schools may improve student ***academic proficiency.***
LIFT Strategy: Recruit and Retain Strong Talent	
• The teacher recruitment process became more strategic in Year Two.[47] LIFT hired a digital marketing company (MyJive) to use social media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram) to recruitment teachers and raise awareness of Project LIFT in the teaching community. • LIFT Schools experienced fewer vacancies that needed to be filled for Year Two (175 vs. 275 in Year One) and all LIFT schools were fully staffed to the start the 2013-14 school year.	• Highly talented teachers may contribute to improvements in **student engagement**, **attendance** and **academic proficiency** • Retention of highly talented teachers may provide stability for students as they work toward improving their **academic proficiency** and improve

[46] A new LIFT staff member, Christopher Triolo, was brought in to LIFT during Spring 2012-13 and has been instrumental in designing and coordinating efforts around implementation of the LIFT Way. His position marks an example of LIFT staff extending their capacity in preparation for year Two.
[47] During the hiring seasons (March-August of prior academic year) for the first two years, LIFT mostly recruited teachers through word-of-mouth, website, job postings, and partner support.

Year Two Implementation Practices	Links to LIFT Leading Indicators
TIME	
LIFT Strategy: Increase the Amount of High Quality Instructional Time for LIFT Students	
• Continuous Learning Calendars (CLCs) increased instructional time for students in four LIFT schools. • The Arts and Science Council, a new LIFT partner, provided intersession programming at CLC's schools.	• CLC's may prevent summer learning loss and contribute to improved student **academic proficiency**. • Intersession programming may boost **attendance** and contribute to decreased **behavioral incidences**. • Extended classroom time with students and additional compensation for teachers at CLC schools may contribute to **teacher retention**
TECHNOLOGY	
LIFT Strategy: Increase Access, Training, and Strategic Use of Technology	
• The 2,247 XO laptops distributed to 1-4th grade students in Year One became more integrated in LIFT schools and technology facilitators were extended to be in place as supports throughout Year Two • The Microsoft Digital Inclusion program continued to strategically target higher at-risk student populations within the LIFT zone in Year Two.	• Integrated technology in the classroom and increased access to technology at home may increase **student engagement** in school. Increased student engagement may then contribute to regular **attendance**, and improvements in **behavior** and **academic proficiency**.
PARENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	
LIFT Strategy: Increase Parent and Community Support for Students in LIFT Schools	
• Newly established School-based Resource Teams brought the community, parents, students, and school staff together to create a common vision for student success and school-community relations.	• Increased parental engagement at LIFT schools may contribute to regular ***student attendance,*** improved ***student behaviors,*** and an overall positive school climate.

The Year Two analyses will assess how the implementation of the Project LIFT initiative evolved across the different focus areas to address the initial challenges presented in this report. In addition, the student outcomes analyses for Year Two will build on the Year One analyses to assess the following:

- Student mobility in LIFT schools;
- Student promotion across the LIFT zone;
- Differences in student academic performance, attendance and behavior between Continuous Learning Calendar LIFT schools and other LIFT schools;
- Student growth on the EOG assessments from Year I to Year II;
- Differences between West Charlotte High School and matched students' EOC proficiency; and,
- The 'on track' to graduation status for the 2012-13 9th grade cohort of West Charlotte HS students.

The Year Two final report will include findings from both the analyses of LIFT implementation across the four focus areas along with findings from the student outcomes analyses for the 2013-14 school year.

Appendix I. Assessing the Impact of the Project LIFT Initiative: Methodological Challenges and Solutions

Methodological Challenges

The nine Project LIFT schools (one high school, one middle school, and six elementary/middle schools) were selected on the basis of three primary factors: 1) historically low performance of their students on standardized tests; 2) high poverty rates among the student body; and, 3) geographic location in the West Charlotte Corridor. From a research perspective, these selection criteria, along with the limited number of schools in the initiative, create a number of methodological challenges that preclude analyses which could directly attribute the impact of the LIFT Initiative to student performance.

1. By definition, the nine LIFT schools are among the lowest performing of the 160 schools within CMS, which limits the availability of similar schools that could constitute a viable comparison group.

2. With only one high school in the initiative, West Charlotte High School, it is not possible to separate any observable 'LIFT effect' from a 'West Charlotte High School effect'.
   a. In addition, the selection of comparison schools for West Charlotte High School was particularly challenging given the low number of high schools in CMS, and the unique challenges facing the student population at West Charlotte.

3. The low number of elementary/middle schools in the initiative - eight - does not provide enough statistical power at the school level to reliably evaluate the significance of any differences observed between LIFT schools' performance and that of other CMS schools.

4. The variation in LIFT elementary/middle schools' grade configurations (two K-5 schools; five PK–8 schools, and one 6-8 school) precludes the LIFT elementary/middle schools from constituting a meaningful group for the sake of comparison with other schools.

Solution: Student Matching

To address the challenges posed by the structure of the initiative itself, the external evaluation relies on the selection of a comparison group of students from non-LIFT schools to support *student-level* analyses of the impact of the Project LIFT initiative on student attendance, behavior and academic performance. The selection of the comparison group of students consisted of a two-stage matching process.

The first stage of the selection process was to identify a set of comparison schools for each LIFT school. In consultation with the CMS Office of Accountability's Research, Evaluation and Analytics department, a set of comparison schools was identified for each LIFT school based on their similarity along the following *school-level* factors:

- Percent male
- Percent Asian, Hispanic, black, native American, multi and white;
- School size (total school enrollment)
- Percent student with disabilities and gifted
- Percent Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and English as a Second Language (ESL)
- Percent who repeated a grade
- Percent overage-for-grade
- Percent of student enrollment in each grade level in the school
- Percent dropout
- Mean rate of attendance that accounts for excused absences, unexcused absences, in-school and out-of-school suspensions
- Percent of students that were mobile at the school
- Percent proficient in math, reading, and science
- Mean growth across math and reading

*3rd Grade students did not have EOG Math or Reading scores available for matching.

The results of the analyses conducted by CMS identified 33 unique comparison schools for the study. Each LIFT elementary school was matched to the six most similar elementary schools; Ranson Middle School was matched the five most similar middle schools in CMS; and West Charlotte High School was matched to the four most similar high schools in CMS. Each LIFT school was matched to multiple comparison schools as a way to control for school-level factors that may influence the behavioral and academic performance of the comparison group of students. Table A1.1 shows which comparison schools were matched to each LIFT school. In addition, Table A1.1 also shows the number of students selected from each comparison school to make up the comparison group of students for each LIFT school.

Table A1.1. LIFT Comparison Schools

Allenbrook Elementary	Ashley Park Elementary	Bruns Academy
• Paw Creek Elementary (72)	• Billingsville Elementary (51)	• Reid Park Academy (77)
• Pinewood Elementary (75)	• Montclaire Elementary (36)	• Tuckaseegee Elementary (86)
• Shamrock Gardens Elementary (61)	• Devonshire Elementary (66)	• Sedgefield Elementary (58)
• Montclaire Elementary (46)	• Sterling Elementary (58)	• Winding Springs Elementary (96)
• Devonshire Elementary (66)	• Paw Creek Elementary (51)	• Newell Elementary (83)
• Sterling Elementary (78)	• Hornet's Nest Elementary (75)	• Hidden Valley Elementary (70)

Druid Hills Academy	Statesville Road Elementary	Thomasboro Academy
• Rama Road Elementary (54)	• Sterling Elementary (100)	• Winding Springs Elementary (67)
• Merry Oaks Intl Academy (53)	• Montclaire Elementary (55)	• Reid Park Academy (81)
• Nations Ford Elementary (51)	• Devonshire Elementary (81)	• Tuckaseegee Elementary (92)
• Winterfield Elementary (59)	• Hornets Nest Elementary (113)	• J H Gunn Elementary (62)
• Oakdale Elementary (94)	• River Oaks Academy (133)	• Newell Elementary (80)
• Whitewater Academy Elementary (95)	• Nations Ford Elementary (69)	• Reedy Creek Elementary (74)

Walter G Byers	Ranson Middle School	West Charlotte HS
• Billingsville Elementary (50)	• Albemarle Road Middle (616)	• West Mecklenburg High (186)
• Montclaire Elementary (22)	• Quail Hollow Middle (443)	• East Mecklenburg High (152)
• Devonshire Elementary (50)	• Whitewater Middle (568)	• Rocky River High (165)
• Sterling Elementary (45)	• Sedgefield Middle (308)	• Zebulon B Vance High (156)
• Paw Creek Elementary (43)	• Martin Luther King Jr Middle (515)	
• Westerly Hills Academy (46)		

The second stage of the matching process involved the selection of both the LIFT and non-LIFT, comparison group of students. LIFT students were eligible for selection into the study group on the basis of three main criteria:

1. Students were enrolled in grades 3 – 9 for the 2012-13 school year;
    a. 9th grade students were *first time* 9th grade students at West Charlotte High School for the 2012-13 school year; and

2. LIFT students attended a LIFT school for at least 90 days during the 2012-13 school year.

Grades 3 – 9 represent the NC EOG testing grades (3 – 8) and the first cohort of students entering West Charlotte High School during the Project LIFT initiative.

Ninety (90) days was selected as an enrollment threshold to represent half the academic year, assuming that this amount of time would afford students the opportunity to have been fully integrated into a LIFT school during Year One of the initiative.

After identifying the LIFT students for the study we selected the *three* most similar students for each LIFT student from each school's set of comparison schools on the basis of their similarity on the following measures from the 2011-12 school year:

- Grade Level
- Age
- Gender
- Race/Ethnicity
- Limited English Proficiency Status
- English as a Second Language Status
- Special Education Status
- Gifted Student Status
- EOG Reading Scaled Score*
- EOG Math Scaled Score*
- Days Enrolled
- Attendance Rate
- Total Schools Attended
- Out-of-school Suspensions
- In-school Suspensions
- Disciplinary Incidents

*3rd Grade students did not have EOG Math or Reading scores available for matching.

Due to the limited number of Pre-K to 8 schools in CMS that were similar enough to the LIFT schools to be selected as comparison schools in the first stage of the matching process, the 6-8th grade students in LIFT Pre-K to 8 schools (Ashley Park, Bruns, Druid Hills, Thomasboro, and WG Byers) were matched to middle school students from the comparison schools for Ranson Middle School (as presented in Table A1.1).

This matching procedure successfully matched 99% of LIFT students in grades 3 – 9 in the 2012-13 school year to a comparison group of students that are as similar as possible to the students at LIFT schools. The three-to-one matching ratio generated a comparison group of students that should be large enough to sustain attrition (from their schools or from CMS) among comparison students over the course of the initiative. By matching with a three-to-one ratio in Year One of the study, we hope to have established a set of comparison students which can be used throughout the course of the external evaluation.

Tables A1.2 –A1.11 (below) present descriptive comparisons between each LIFT school and the comparison group of students selected for students from the comparison schools to show the similarity between the LIFT students and the comparison students.

Comparative Analyses

Given the equivalence of the matched LIFT and comparison students, the analyses for the Year One evaluation consisted of Chi-Square and T-tests to assess the significance of differences between the LIFT and comparison groups of students along the key behavioral and academic outcomes presented in the report.

Limitations for Comparative Analyses at West Charlotte High School

Significance testing was not conducted for the matched 9th grade students in Year One for two reasons. First, the vast majority of 9th grade students do not take the End of Course assessments such as English II and Biology during their first year in high school. And second, even with strict criteria for matching in

place, the comparison schools for West Charlotte High School are notably different from West Charlotte High School. While the comparison group of 9th grade students selected from the comparison high schools is roughly equivalent to first time 9th graders at West Charlotte High School (see Table A1.10), the school-level differences between West Charlotte and the four comparison schools (see Table A1.11) make it difficult to interpret the results of student-level comparisons in Year One.

In future years of the external evaluation we will present the results of comparative analyses between the first time 9th grade cohort at West Charlotte High School and the comparison group of high school students looking at the performance of these groups over time. Presenting these comparisons over multiple years will provide a better way to compare the two groups of students along key behavioral and academic outcomes.

Equivalence of LIFT Students and Matched Comparison Students

Table A1.2. Allenbrook Elementary Students versus Comparison Students

	Allenbrook	Comparison Students	Difference
Mean Age	8.7	8.7	0.0
% Grade 2	29.6	29.7	-0.1
% Grade 3	34.3	32.9	1.4
% Grade 4	36.2	37.4	-1.3
Mean EOG Math Scaled Score	339.7	338.5	1.2
Mean EOG Reading Scaled Score	334.3	333.4	0.9
% Promoted from 2011-12	98.6	98.5	0.1
% Female	51.6	47.5	4.2
% African American	70.4	70.6	-0.2
% White	0.9	2.3	-1.3
% Hispanic	1.4	2.5	-1.1
% Other Race	16.9	9.8	7.1
% Limited English Proficiency	16.4	17.3	-0.9
% English as a Second Language	6.6	8.0	-1.5
% Special Ed.	7.0	6.5	0.5
Mean Days Enrolled	176.9	176.1	0.8
Mean Daily Attended	170.4	169.4	1.0
Average Daily Attendance	96.3	96.2	0.1
% Transfer Students	11.7	12.6	-0.8
% with 1 or more OSS	11.3	10.6	0.7
% with 1 or more ISS	0.9	1.5	-0.6
% with 1 or more Disciplinary Incident	24.4	19.4	5.1
Total Students	213	398	

Table A1.3. Ashley Park Elementary Students versus Comparison Students

	Ashley Park	Comparison Students	Difference
Mean Age	8.5	8.6	0.0
% Grade 2	34.5	31.5	3.1
% Grade 3	31.0	36.2	-5.3
% Grade 4	34.5	32.3	2.2
Mean EOG Math Scaled Score	343.5	342.8	0.7
Mean EOG Reading Scaled Score	333.5	332.2	1.3
% Promoted from 2011-12	98.2	97.0	1.2
% Female	47.0	43.0	4.0
% African American	84.5	76.9	7.7
% White	1.8	2.1	-0.3
% Hispanic	1.2	1.2	0.0
% Other Race	4.2	7.1	-3.0
% Limited English Proficiency	10.7	15.1	-4.4
% English as a Second Language	5.4	7.4	-2.1
% Special Ed.	16.7	15.1	1.5
Mean Days Enrolled	177.0	177.0	0.0
Mean Daily Attended	169.3	169.9	-0.6
Average Daily Attendance	95.6	95.9	-0.3
% Transfer Students	10.7	11.3	-0.6
% with 1 or more OSS	21.4	14.5	6.9
% with 1 or more ISS	5.4	2.4	3.0
% with 1 or more Disciplinary Incident	21.4	14.0	7.5
Total Students	168	337	

Table A1.4. Bruns Academy Students versus Comparison Students

	Bruns Academy	Comparison Students	Difference
Mean Age	8.6	8.6	0.1
% Grade 2	35.5	36.0	-0.5
% Grade 3	33.2	35.1	-1.9
% Grade 4	31.4	28.9	2.4
Mean EOG Math Scaled Score	337.9	339.2	-1.3
Mean EOG Reading Scaled Score	334.1	334.9	-0.8
% Promoted from 2011-12	95.5	97.2	-1.8
% Female	53.2	53.6	-0.4
% African American	89.6	86.2	3.4
% White	0.9	1.3	-0.4
% Hispanic	0.9	0.6	0.3
% Other Race	2.7	4.3	-1.5
% Limited English Proficiency	6.4	8.7	-2.4
% English as a Second Language	3.2	3.8	-0.7
% Special Ed.	11.4	11.5	-0.1
Mean Days Enrolled	173.4	173.5	-0.1
Mean Daily Attended	165.0	166.1	-1.1
Average Daily Attendance	95.0	95.6	-0.6
% Transfer Students	19.6	17.0	2.5
% with 1 or more OSS	10.0	9.4	0.6
% with 1 or more ISS	4.1	1.9	2.2
% with 1 or more Disciplinary Incident	8.2	7.0	1.2
Total Students	220	470	

Table A1.5. Druid Hills Academy Elementary Students versus Comparison Students

	Druid Hills	Comparison Students	Difference
Mean Age	8.7	8.7	0.0
% Grade 2	34.4	34.0	0.4
% Grade 3	33.9	33.0	0.9
% Grade 4	31.8	33.0	-1.2
Mean EOG Math Scaled Score	333.5	337.8	-4.3
Mean EOG Reading Scaled Score	331.2	334.7	-3.6
% Promoted from 2011-12	96.4	98.0	-1.6
% Female	58.0	55.9	2.0
% African American	88.2	84.0	4.2
% White	0.5	1.0	-0.5
% Hispanic	2.6	2.2	0.3
% Other Race	5.6	7.1	-1.5
% Limited English Proficiency	8.2	12.1	-3.9
% English as a Second Language	5.1	7.6	-2.5
% Special Ed.	12.8	10.3	2.5
Mean Days Enrolled	178.8	178.3	0.5
Mean Daily Attended	169.6	196.7	-27.1
Average Daily Attendance	94.8	95.1	-0.3
% Transfer Students	12.8	11.8	1.0
% with 1 or more OSS	17.4	13.1	4.4
% with 1 or more ISS	2.1	2.0	0.1
% with 1 or more Disciplinary Incident	6.2	6.4	-0.3
Total Students	195	406	

Table A1.6. Statesville Road Elementary Students versus Comparison Students

	Statesville Road	Comparison Students	Difference
Mean Age	8.8	8.7	0.1
% Grade 2	27.5	27.6	-0.1
% Grade 3	30.4	33.6	-3.2
% Grade 4	42.1	38.8	3.3
Mean EOG Math Scaled Score	336.4	337.6	-1.2
Mean EOG Reading Scaled Score	336.7	336.3	0.4
% Promoted from 2011-12	95.4	97.8	-2.5
% Female	51.8	51.0	0.8
% African American	82.5	74.6	7.9
% White	2.5	2.9	-0.4
% Hispanic	2.1	2.5	-0.4
% Other Race	3.9	5.3	-1.3
% Limited English Proficiency	9.6	14.0	-4.3
% English as a Second Language	4.3	5.4	-1.2
% Special Ed.	11.4	11.3	0.2
Mean Days Enrolled	178.6	177.7	1.0
Mean Daily Attended	173.2	171.2	2.0
Average Daily Attendance	96.4	96.3	0.1
% Transfer Students	8.6	9.3	-0.7
% with 1 or more OSS	9.3	8.7	0.6
% with 1 or more ISS	2.5	1.8	0.7
% with 1 or more Disciplinary Incident	12.1	11.4	0.7
Total Students	280	551	

Table A1.7. Thomasboro Academy Students versus Comparison Students

	Thomasboro	Comparison Students	Difference
Mean Age	8.8	8.7	0.1
% Grade 2	28.2	29.6	-1.4
% Grade 3	36.3	36.2	0.1
% Grade 4	35.5	34.2	1.3
Mean EOG Math Scaled Score	332.6	336.2	-3.6
Mean EOG Reading Scaled Score	331.3	333.2	-1.9
% Promoted from 2011-12	94.9	96.5	-1.6
% Female	47.0	48.7	-1.7
% African American	70.5	67.8	2.8
% White	3.4	2.2	1.2
% Hispanic	4.3	5.3	-1.0
% Other Race	16.2	14.5	1.8
% Limited English Proficiency	17.5	17.1	0.4
% English as a Second Language	9.4	9.2	0.2
% Special Ed.	13.7	11.8	1.8
Mean Days Enrolled	174.3	174.8	-0.5
Mean Daily Attended	166.5	167.7	-1.1
Average Daily Attendance	95.5	95.9	-0.4
% Transfer Students	23.5	15.1	8.4
% with 1 or more OSS	16.2	11.8	4.4
% with 1 or more ISS	12.0	5.9	6.1
% with 1 or more Disciplinary Incident	24.8	17.1	7.7
Total Students	234	456	

Table A1.8. Walter G. Byers Elementary School Students versus Comparison Students

	Walter G. Byers	Comparison Students	Difference
Mean Age	8.7	8.7	0.1
% Grade 2	26.1	30.1	-4.0
% Grade 3	34.6	32.0	2.5
% Grade 4	39.4	37.9	1.5
Mean EOG Math Scaled Score	332.8	333.6	-0.9
Mean EOG Reading Scaled Score	330.1	331.4	-1.4
% Promoted from 2011-12	96.4	97.7	-1.3
% Female	51.5	50.8	0.7
% African American	90.9	87.9	3.0
% White	0.00	0.0	0.0
% Hispanic	1.2	1.6	-0.4
% Other Race	6.1	7.8	-1.8
% Limited English Proficiency	9.1	8.6	0.5
% English as a Second Language	5.5	5.9	-0.4
% Special Ed.	13.3	12.5	0.8
Mean Days Enrolled	175.6	174.5	1.1
Mean Daily Attended	167.0	166.5	0.5
Average Daily Attendance	95.0	95.3	-0.3
% Transfer Students	9.7	11.3	-1.6
% with 1 or more OSS	32.1	18.8	13.4
% with 1 or more ISS	28.5	6.6	21.8
% with 1 or more Disciplinary Incident	32.7	18.8	14.0
Total Students	165	256	

Table A1.9. LIFT Middle School Students versus Comparison Students

	LIFT Middle School	Comparison Students	Difference
Mean Age	11.7	11.6	0.1
% Grade 4	0.0	0.0	0.0
% Grade 5	34.3	34.9	-0.6
% Grade 6	34.3	32.8	1.6
% Grade 7	31.0	32.1	-1.1
% Grade 8	0.3	0.2	0.1
Mean EOG Math Scaled Score	340.9	342.8	-1.8
Mean EOG Reading Scaled Score	341.4	342.6	-1.2
% Promoted from 2011-12	99.0	99.0	0.0
% Female	49.6	49.4	0.1
% African American	79.2	68.8	10.4
% White	1.9	6.3	-4.4
% Hispanic	2.0	2.5	-0.4
% Other Race	7.4	7.8	-0.4
% Limited English Proficiency	15.4	21.8	-6.3
% English as a Second Language	3.0	4.5	-1.5
% Special Ed.	16.2	17.1	-0.9
Mean Days Enrolled	176.9	176.7	0.2
Mean Days Attended	168.3	168.6	-0.4
Average Daily Attendance	95.1	95.1	0.0
% Transfers	11.7	10.5	1.2
% with 1 or more OSS	31.1	25.0	6.1
% with 1 or more ISS	16.0	16.6	-0.6
% with 1 or more Disciplinary Incident	16.3	18.5	-2.1
Total Students	1873	2450	

Table A1.10. West Charlotte High School Students versus Comparison Students

	West Charlotte	Comparison Students	Difference
Mean Age	13.7	13.6	0.1
Mean EOG Math Scaled Score	348.3	349.3	-1.1
Mean EOG Reading Scaled Score	348.7	348.3	0.4
% Promoted from 2011-12	98.9	99.5	-0.6
% Female	58.0	52.2	5.8
% African American	91.3	87.7	3.6
% White	0.5	1.8	-1.3
% Hispanic	0.8	1.4	-0.6
% Other Race	6.0	7.7	-1.8
% Limited English Proficiency	6.5	7.4	-0.9
% English as a Second Language	2.7	2.1	0.6
% Special Ed.	21.5	21.6	-0.0
Mean Days Enrolled	176.1	177.0	-0.8
Mean Daily Attended	165.9	168.2	-2.3
Average Daily Attendance	94.2	95.0	-0.8
% Transfer Students	9.8	8.4	1.5
% with 1 or more OSS	37.3	32.5	4.9
% with 1 or more ISS	24.5	23.7	0.8
% with 1 or more Disciplinary Incident	20.4	23.4	-2.9
Total Students	367	659	

Table A1.11. West Charlotte High School versus Comparison High Schools: 2012-13 School Year

	West Charlotte High School	East Mecklenburg HS	Rocky River HS	West Mecklenburg HS	Zebulon B Vance HS
4 Year Graduation Rate	71.1	83.8	92.6	77.4	81.3
% Proficient on EOC Math I	9.7	21.1	13.2	12.7	8.9
% Proficient on EOC English II	24.4	61.6	41.9	37.9	28.3
% Proficient on EOC Biology	18.0	38.5	40.7	30.8	24.1
% Promoted from 2011-12	89.0	96.2	96.8	90.9	92.8
% Female	54.5	51.0	46.4	47.8	50.0
% African American	86.4	46.2	62.3	64.2	66.6
% White	1.8	23.0	10.9	9.8	3.2
% Hispanic	1.3	3.9	3.2	2.6	1.9
% Other Race	7.5	12.8	6.9	9.5	5.2
% Limited English Proficiency	10.4	21.5	17.3	19.7	24.3
% English as a Second Language	4.6	5.7	2.8	3.4	5.5
% Special Ed.	18.7	26.1	17.6	14.2	15.5
Average Daily Attendance	92.2	94.4	94.3	93.5	91.1
% Transfer Students	6.8	5.3	5.5	7.3	6.6
% with 1 or more OSS	30.1	14.4	21.9	22.7	21.3
% with 1 or more ISS	25.2	2.5	3.6	26.5	7.9
Total Students	1,566	1,729	1,641	1,788	1,698

Appendix II. North Carolina End of Course & End of Grade Performance: 2011-12 and 2012-13

Tables A2.1 and A2.2 present changes in the proficiency levels on the North Carolina End-of-Grade (EOG) and End-of-Course (EOC) Assessments from the 2011-12 school year to the 2012-13 school year. In 2012-13, North Carolina aligned the EOG and EOC assessments with the Common Core State Standards, resulting in dramatic declines in rates of proficiency across the state. Tables A2.1 and A2.2 present proficiency rates on each EOG and EOC assessment for the State of North Carolina, Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools, and three other urban districts: Wake County, Guilford County and Forsythe County.

Table A2.1. Percent of Students Scoring Proficient or Above on North Carolina End of Grade Assessments: 2011-12 to 2012-13

School District	Math (%)		Reading (%)		Science (%)	
	2011-12	2012-13	2011-12	2012-13	2011-12	2012-13
North Carolina	67.5	32.0	82.8	42.3	76.6	52.2
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	82.5	46.4	71.1	45.5	76.8	53.5
Wake	86.4	54.3	77.4	54.1	79.5	63
Guilford	82.1	41.6	68.1	41.1	71	45.1
Forsythe	63.3	30.9	80.6	40.4	73.1	50.4

Table A2.2. Percent of Students Scoring Proficient or Above on North Carolina End of Course Assessments: 2011-12 to 2012-13

School District	Math^ (%)		English II (%)		Biology (%)	
	2011-12	2012-13	2011-12	2012-13	2011-12	2012-13
North Carolina	78.7	36.3	82.9	51.2	83.0	45.6
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	75.1	38.1	82.6	53.4	84.2	47.7
Wake	86.1	48.5	87	63.2	87.2	58.7
Guilford	78.2	38	80.8	51.6	80.1	48.2
Forsythe	74.8	36.3	81.0	48.1	75.6	39.6

^2011-12 Math I = 2012-13 Algebra I

Appendix III. Student Academic and Behavioral Performance: LIFT schools versus Comparison Schools

Each of the following tables present the academic and behavioral performance of students at LIFT elementary and middle schools compared to a comparison group of students selected for the study. Each table includes:

- Percentage Proficient in Math EOG
- Percentage Proficient in Reading EOG
- Percentage Proficient in Science EOG
- Average Daily Attendance Rate
- Percentage of Students with 1 or more Out of School Suspension(s)

Table A3.1. Allenbrook Elementary Students versus Comparison Students

	Allenbrook	Comparison Students
% Proficient in Math	39.3	33.7
% Proficient in Reading	23.5	24.0
% Proficient in Science	20.0	32.6
% ADA	95.9	95.5
% with 1 or More OSS	5.6	7.5
Total Students	213	398

Table A3.2. Ashley Park Elementary Students versus Comparison Students

	Ashley Park	Comparison Students
% Proficient in Math*	31.8	23.5
% Proficient in Reading	21.5	20.7
% Proficient in Science	41.4	31.0
% ADA	95.2	94.6
% w/1 or More OSS*	19.0	14.3
Total Students	327	778

*p<.05

Table A3.3. Bruns Academy Elementary Students versus Comparison Students

	Bruns Academy	Comparison Students
% Proficient in Math*	13.6	22.9
% Proficient in Reading*	12.8	24.3
% Proficient in Science	24.8	30.3
%ADA	93.6	94.4
% w/1 or More OSS*	26.2	14.6
Total Students	427	1003

*p<.05

Table A3.4. Druid Hills Academy Elementary Students versus Comparison Students

	Druid Hills	Comparison Students
% Proficient in Math*	11.6	22.2
% Proficient in Reading*	14.7	25.7
% Proficient in Science*	11.1	30.0
% ADA	93.9	94.4
% w/1 or More OSS*	15.6	11.1
Total Students	371	859

*p<.05

Table A3.5. Statesville Road Elementary Students versus Comparison Students

	Statesville Road	Comparison Students
% Proficient in Math	24.7	31.8
% Proficient in Reading*	18.2	24.3
% Proficient in Science*	39.1	26.4
% ADA	95.7	95.6
% w/1 or More OSS	8.9	7.1
Total Students	280	551

*p<.05

Table A3.6. Thomasboro Academy Elementary Students versus Comparison Students

	Thomasboro	Comparison Students
% Proficient in Math*	31.7	21.7
% Proficient in Reading*	17.9	22.8
% Proficient in Science	35.3	28.1
% ADA	95.1	94.2
% w/1 or More OSS	15.7	16.1
Total Students	427	976

*p<.05

Table A3.7. Walter G. Byers Elementary Students versus Comparison Students

	WG Byers	Comparison Students
% Proficient in Math	18.2	20.9
% Proficient in Reading*	14.3	21.4
% Proficient in Science*	56.4	36.2
% ADA	94.9	94.3
% w/1 or More OSS	17.4	15.0
Total Students	317	660

*p<.05

Table A3.8. Ranson Middle School Students versus Comparison Students

	Ranson	Comparison Students
% Proficient in Math	23.5	20.6
% Proficient in Reading	25.7	27.9
% Proficient in Science*	48.1	39.3
% ADA	95.1	94.0
% w/1 or More OSS	13.6	15.6
Total Students	986	1888

*p<.05

Table A3.9, below, presents the percentage of LIFT and comparison students scoring proficient or above on the Math, Reading and Science EOG assessments, by grade level.

Table A3.9. LIFT Students versus Comparison Students

	% Proficient in Math		% Proficient in Reading		% Proficient in Science	
	LIFT	*Comparison*	*LIFT*	*Comparison*	*LIFT*	*Comparison*
Grade 3	24.4	26.0	15.6	24.7	-	-
Grade 4	28.3	32.0	18.4	26.1	-	-
Grade 5	24.8	32.0	14.2	22.7	26.4	27.9
Grade 6	23.8	22.7	25.3	27.0	-	-
Grade 7	23.6	22.1	24.0	29.9	-	-
Grade 8	17.8	16.9	17.6	24.6	47.3	39.3

Appendix IV. Supplemental Table for Teach for America Teachers & Out of School Suspensions

Table A4.1. Teach for American Teachers as a Percentage of all Teachers at LIFT Schools: 2011-12 and 2012-13

	2011-12		2012-13	
	% TFA Teachers	Total Teachers	% TFA Teachers	Total Teachers
Allenbrook (K-5)	0%	24	11%	28
Statesville Rd (K-5)	6%	36	11%	35
Ashley Park (PK-8)	8%	36	6%	35
Bruns (PK-8)	5%	43	6%	47
Druid Hills (PK-8)	0%	35	0%	38
Thomasboro (PK-8)	3%	36	3%	39
WG Byers (PK-8)	5%	37	8%	39
Ranson (6-8)	19%	62	24%	55
West Charlotte High School (9-12)	5%	110	15%	115
All LIFT Schools	7%	419	11%	431

Table A4.2. Percentage of Students at LIFT Schools Receiving at Least 1 Out of School Suspension: 2011-12 and 2012-13

	2011-12		2012-13	
LIFT Schools	% of Students	Total Students	% of Students	Total Students
Allenbrook (K-5)	10%	449	11%	509
Statesville Rd (K-5)	10%	602	14%	581
Ashley Park (PK-8)	31%	538	29%	545
Bruns (PK-8)	16%	780	34%	763
Druid Hills (PK-8)	19%	618	23%	633
Thomasboro (PK-8)	28%	735	26%	736
WG Byers (PK-8)	35%	572	24%	535
Ranson (6-8)	32%	1134	27%	1111
West Charlotte High School (9-12)	43%	1740	30%	1566
All LIFT Schools	28%	7168	26%	6979

Table A4.3 presents the number of out of school suspensions issued per day at LIFT schools in 2011-12 and 2012-13. Suspensions per school day were calculated as: Total Out of School Suspensions Issued / 180 School Days.

Table A4.3. Out of School Suspensions per School Day at LIFT: 2011-12 and 2012-13

LIFT Schools	2011-12	2012-13
Allenbrook (K-5)	0.4	0.5
Statesville Rd (K-5)	0.5	1.0
Ashley Park (PK-8)	2.4	2.3
Bruns (PK-8)	1.3	3.6
Druid Hills (PK-8)	1.4	1.6
Thomasboro (PK-8)	2.5	2.3
WG Byers (PK-8)	3.0	1.7
Ranson (6-8)	4.6	3.9
West Charlotte High School (9-12)	14.7	6.6

Appendix V. Preliminary Implementation Findings Memo

Project LIFT: Preliminary Implementation Findings

Prepared by Research for Action
August 15, 2013

Introduction

Research for Action (RFA) is currently conducting a five-year external evaluation of the Project Leadership and Investment for Transformation (LIFT) Initiative in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District (CMS). This memo provides an initial update on Year One implementation during the 2012-13 school year across each of Project LIFT's four focus areas: Talent, Time, Technology, and Parent/Community Engagement. The preliminary findings were developed from data collected through interviews with LIFT staff and principals, focus groups with new and veteran teachers, program documents, and a media scan.[48] In the first year of the initiative, Project LIFT achieved several important successes across each focus area. At the same time, and not surprisingly given the complexity and scope of the initiative, Project LIFT also experienced a number of challenges during the first year of implementation.

In this memo, we identify both key successes and challenges across each of the focus areas. We also provide formative feedback by identifying important underlying conditions related to the challenges that LIFT has encountered in its first year of implementation in each of the four focus areas. We also highlight several important cross-cutting factors that affect implementation across LIFT program components. This memo is designed to present high-level findings only, and does not include an exhaustive account of implementation during the initial year of LIFT programming. A more comprehensive review of the first year of the initiative, including implementation findings and student outcomes, will be presented in the Year One final report (February 2014).

Purpose of Research for Action's Project LIFT Preliminary Implementation Memo

This implementation memo includes:

- **Status updates** across each of the four focus areas in relation to Year One goals;
- Highlights of **implementation successes** in each focus area;
- Descriptions of **implementation challenges** in each focus area;
- Identification of **key elements to watch more closely** moving into Year Two of the external evaluation.

[48] See Appendix A for a complete list of data sources.

The document is divided into four sections. Section I situates Project LIFT within a broader context of the school turnaround movement, public/private partnerships in education, and the local educational landscape in Charlotte. Section II presents the status of the initiative within each of the four program focus areas. Section III describes how several cross-cutting factors – leadership in the district and schools, the LIFT staffing levels and capacity, and communications among key stakeholders – supported or hindered successful implementation of the initiative in Year One. Finally, Section IV presents a brief summary and a preview of the Year One final report.

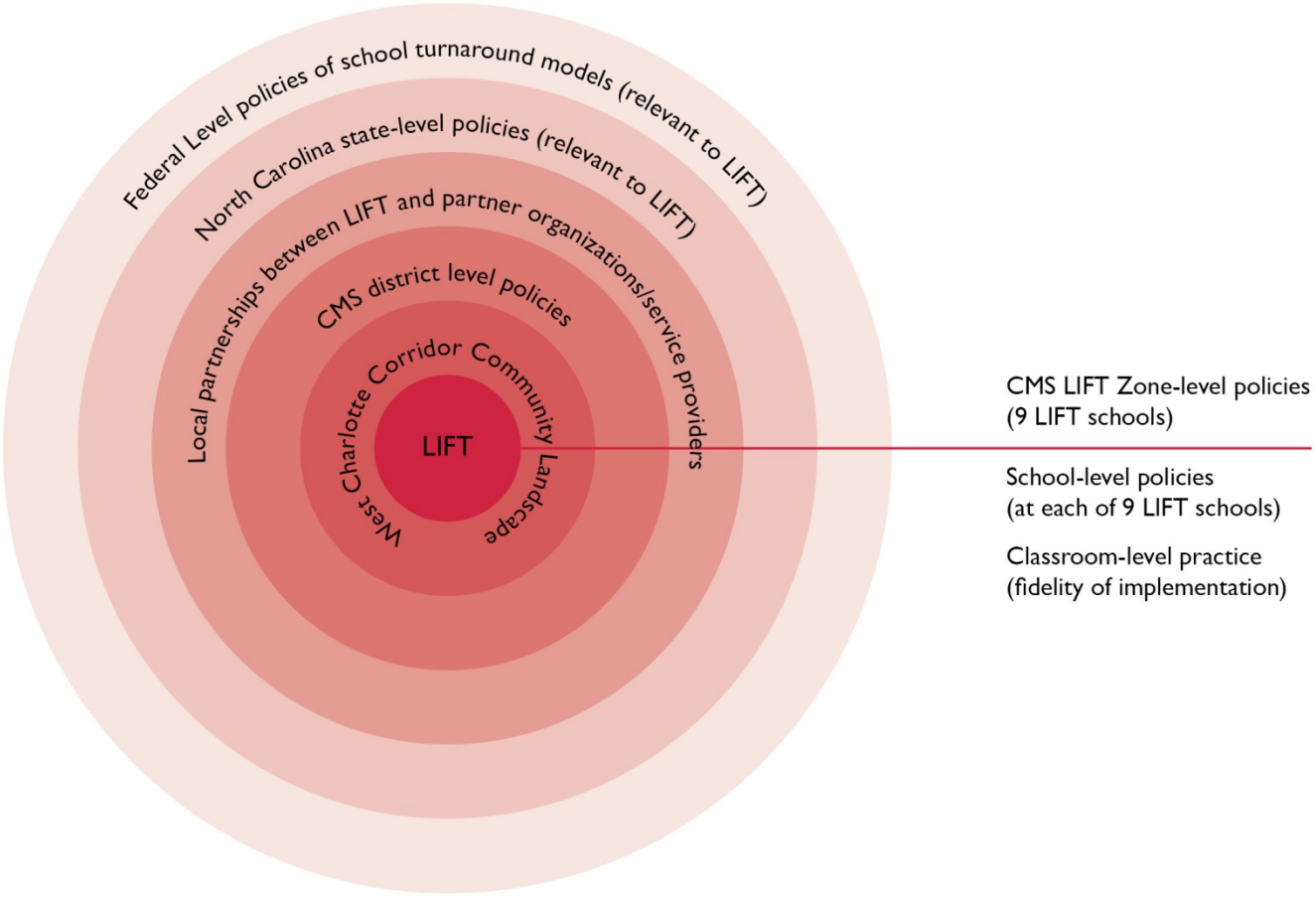
Section I. Project LIFT in Context

Project LIFT is a five-year district turnaround effort that was begun through a public-private partnership between CMS and the local philanthropic and business communities. An initial investment of $55 million in private support facilitated the development of a semi-autonomous "LIFT zone" within CMS, solely dedicated to the rapid turnaround of the eight elementary and middle schools that feed into West Charlotte High School (WCHS) in the West Charlotte Corridor (WCC). [49] While Project LIFT is similar to other public-private partnerships in public education (*e.g.,* the Harlem Children's Zone), it is distinguished by its institutional position within CMS and its focus on developing partnerships to implement the turnaround initiative. By operating as a semi-autonomous zone within CMS, Project LIFT can efficiently draw on both its public and private resources to drive the initiative. Further, the high number and range of partners involved in Project LIFT sets it apart from other initiatives that rely on the work of fewer intermediary organizations. Through the development of strategic partnerships with multiple organizations, Project LIFT can expand upon its own internal capacity to achieve its long-term goals: achieving 90% proficiency in math and English across the zone; that 90% of students meet annual growth in math and English; and that 90% of WCHS students graduate on time.

Figure 1 presents a simplified representation of the political and social contexts that influence Project LIFT.

[49] CMS schools are organized by high school feeder patterns into seven distinct zones. In a recent shift within CMS, beginning with the 2013-14 school year *zones* will now be referred to as *learning communities*. Throughout this memo, we continue to refer to the Project LIFT schools as the LIFT zone.

Figure 1. Project LIFT in Context



Like other turnaround initiatives, Project LIFT operates within a variety of complex socioeconomic, governmental, and policy contexts. Each concentric circle of the graphic presented in Figure 1 is described in more detail below:

- **Federal policies:** Several LIFT schools receive federal support through a number of grant programs, including 21st Century Learning Grants and Title I School Improvement Grants. In addition, all LIFT schools are participating in a state-wide pilot of the *Indistar Web-Based Planning Tool to Support School Improvement*.[50]
- **North Carolina policies:** LIFT schools are subject to the North Carolina State Educator Evaluation System (NCEES), which provides the framework for the teacher and principal evaluation systems in all Project LIFT schools. In addition, Project LIFT had to obtain approval from the North Carolina State Department of Education to advance one of the key implementation strategies in the first year of the initiative – the establishment of a Continuous Learning Calendar (CLC) in four LIFT schools.
- **Local partnerships:** Partnerships among Project LIFT, individual LIFT schools, and local partner organizations operate as a driving force behind central implementation strategies. The partnerships build Project LIFT's internal capacity and bring out-of-district resources to support

[50] http://www2.ed.gov/programs/21stcclc/index.html; http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/index.html; http://www.indistar.org/

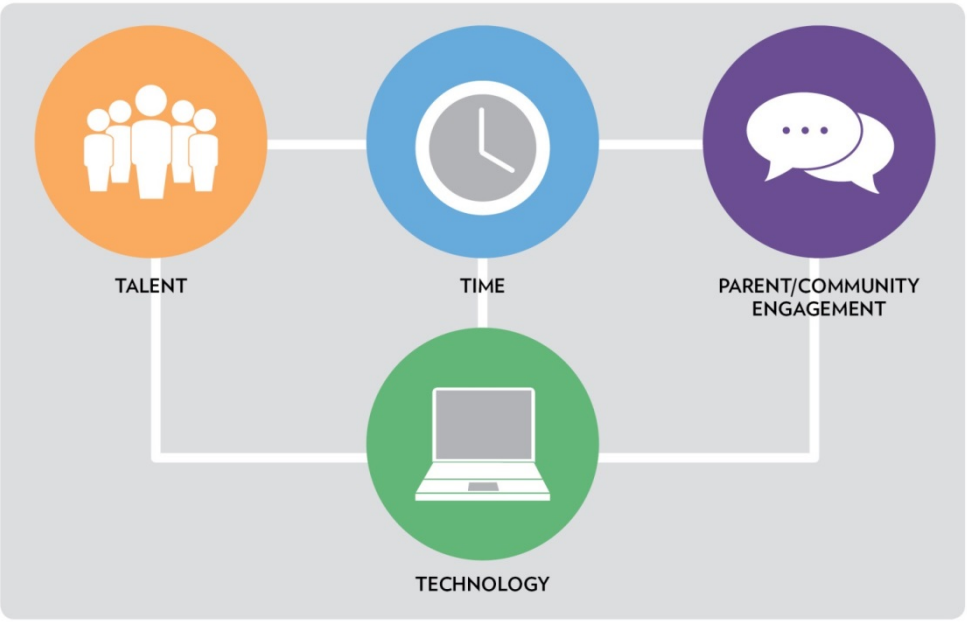
students at LIFT schools. The ability of LIFT staff to efficiently develop, organize, and coordinate a diverse range of partner organizations in the WCC will be crucial for the long-term success of the initiative.

- **Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District policies:** LIFT schools are subject to a range of CMS policies that are consistent for all schools across the District. For example, all LIFT schools were required to adopt the district's Balanced Literacy approach to curriculum and instruction in 2012-13.
- **West Charlotte Corridor:** The WCC faces challenges associated with persistent poverty rates and low educational attainment among its residents.
- **LIFT zone policies:** The LIFT zone serves roughly 7,500 students in its nine schools in CMS. Within the LIFT zone, the initiative has the autonomy to develop and implement zone-level policies across LIFT schools. For example, unlike other schools in the district, LIFT schools have considerable flexibility in staffing their schools. Also, although they were not district-wide programs, schools in the LIFT zone were able to introduce Discovery Education to support Data-Driven Instruction, and the One Laptop per Child (OLPC) program in grades 1 to 4.

Components of Project LIFT: Four Pillars

A fundamental premise of the Project LIFT initiative is that a multi-pronged approach is necessary to turn around historically-underperforming schools. Project LIFT is designed to develop talented teachers and school leaders, provide students with additional instructional time, and create opportunities for parents to support their students through active engagement; technology provides essential tools to support each of these approaches. Figure 2 presents the four Project LIFT focus areas: Talent, Time, Technology, and Parent/Community Engagement.

Figure 2. Project LIFT's Focus Areas



In Year One, LIFT staff placed a heavy emphasis on Talent. This emphasis involved targeted recruitment and training for LIFT staff, school leaders and teachers whose skill sets and passions aligned with the LIFT initiative.

There was considerable overlap across the four focus areas throughout the year. Most notably, the use of technology was prominent within every focus area: to support Data-Driven Instruction for principals and teachers (Talent), to extend and improve the instructional time for students in the classroom and in credit recovery programs (Time), and as a medium to communicate with parents and community residents about opportunities in the initiative (Parent/Community Engagement). It is still too early to fully understand how the four pillars will interact over the course of the initiative. However, it is clear from the first year of implementation that the strategies within and across the four pillars will interact in dynamic ways and may affect the short- and long-term success of the overall initiative.

Section II. Preliminary Implementation Findings

Implementation of Project LIFT in Year One was largely shaped by the opportunities and challenges associated with simultaneously planning and implementing a complex initiative with a diverse range of stakeholders. In the pre-planning year leading up to Year One, [51] and throughout the first year of the initiative, Project LIFT leadership was charged with a challenging array of tasks, including:

- Identifying key goals;
- Developing strategies to meet these goals;
- Developing internal LIFT staff capacity to implement these strategies;[52]
- Developing partnerships with local partner organizations/service providers to operationalize the strategies within each program focus area;
- Developing communications strategies for stakeholders across the initiative to help multiple audiences understand the opportunities available to them as a result of LIFT; and,
- Securing stakeholder buy-in.

Year One was marked both by a number of important successes that provide a strong foundation leading into Year Two, as well as significant challenges that will be important to watch as implementation continues. Below, we identify the most important of these for each of the four Project LIFT pillars. In particular, we highlight factors that contribute to challenges in Year One to provide formative feedback that can contribute to adjustments in Year Two programming. Additionally, we identify key elements to watch more closely during Year Two of the external evaluation.

[51] 2011-12 was the pre-planning year for Project LIFT; RFA did not begin its external evaluation activities until summer 2012.
[52] See Appendix B for an overview of LIFT Staff capacity and stability in Year One

1. Talent

The belief that effective principals and teachers are essential to ensuring that all students meet CMS's academic standards is a guiding principal of LIFT. This emphasis on identifying and supporting talent among teachers and principals has been a central focus of Year One. Table 1 presents key Talent goals as described in the LIFT strategic plan and conversations with LIFT staff, and identifies key successes and challenges in meeting these goals in Year One.

Table 1. Talent: Year One Implementation Status Update

Short-term goals/strategies	Key successes	Key challenges
Establish a strong, mission-aligned, talent base	• School-based staff who were not mission- aligned with LIFT were displaced from all nine schools. • All LIFT staff vacancies were filled by the end of Year One. • All teacher/principal vacancies were filled with mission-aligned staff to start Year One.	

Develop school-based talent	• A mission-aligned and trained teacher candidate pool was created to fill vacancies at LIFT schools.
	• LIFT principals identified Irreplaceable teachers.
	• LIFT Staff and Talent Partners coordinated their efforts to provide targeted support for principals and teachers:
	  ○ UVA School Turnaround Program
	  ○ Teach For America
	  ○ New Leaders for New Schools
	  ○ Public Impact: Reach Extension Project
	• LIFT principals developed into a supportive professional network for knowledge sharing and feedback.
		• Teacher professional development opportunities were "too general."
		• School-based supports were not clearly indefinable as LIFT supports:
		  ○ Instructional staff
		  ○ Instructional resources
		  ○ Professional development
		• TFA supports for their TFA teacher corps members in LIFT schools were limited.

Retain high quality staff		• The LIFT staff experienced turnover and vacancies. • Some LIFT schools experienced mid-year teacher turnover.

As is evident in Table 1, LIFT was successful in reaching many of its Talent-related goals by securing mission-aligned staff at LIFT schools, and supporting the professional development of principals.

In particular, support for LIFT principals provided by the LIFT leadership and key partners was a crucial success. Throughout the first year, the LIFT principals developed into a professional learning community through their shared experiences in leading LIFT schools and participating in a range of professional learning opportunities. By the end of the school year, this group became a functioning support network where principals could reach out to one another to share ideas, solicit advice, or to simply talk through an issue with a supportive colleague.

While principal development and staffing-up at LIFT schools were marked successes in Year One, the initiative did encounter a range of challenges that will need to be addressed in Year Two. Specifically:

- **Staff Turnover.** In Year One, much focus was centered on ensuring that mission-aligned staff were in place at all LIFT schools. However, a clearly defined LIFT approach to curriculum and instruction was absent. This was largely the result of turnover in the LIFT Director of Teaching and Learning position during the 2012-13 school year.
- **Lack of Teacher Preparedness.** A number of the new teachers hired in the staffing-up period prior to Year One were drawn from Teach for America (TFA). LIFT staff and teachers indicated that many new TFA teachers were unprepared for the classroom, and were not receiving the supports from TFA that they needed to be effective.
- **Limited Guidance and Communication.** In focus groups, new and veteran teachers suggested that the LIFT leadership did not adequately communicate the "LIFT way." Both new and veteran teachers expressed a desire for more direction and instructional resources from Project LIFT leadership. At the end of Year One, there was a lack of clarity among some teachers about what they should be doing in LIFT classrooms and what LIFT resources they should be utilizing to achieve both short- and long-term LIFT goals.

What to Watch For

Given these initial implementation findings detailed above, our second year of research in the Talent pillar could focus on the following issues:

- **Communicating and Supporting the "LIFT Way."** How do LIFT staff develop, communicate, and roll-out the newly developed LIFT approach to curriculum and instruction? How has the LIFT initiative contributed to changes in the culture at LIFT schools?
- **Talent Retention.** Will LIFT Schools be able to retain their high quality teachers as the initiative progresses into Year II? Are teacher vacancies being filled from trained teacher candidate pool?
- **Professional Development.** How will LIFT align professional development opportunities with the needs of LIFT school staff? What additional/new instructional resources will be extended to LIFT teachers? How will principals utilize irreplaceable teachers to increase the capacity of all staff at LIFT schools?

2. Time

During Year One, LIFT sought to extend quality learning time for LIFT students by creating high quality out-of-school time (OST) opportunities across the LIFT zone, providing opportunities for off-track WCHS students to recover credits, and establishing Continuous Learning Calendars (CLC) to increase the hours spent in school and decrease the length of vacation time for students at four LIFT schools. Table 2 presents major successes and challenges related to these Year One Time goals and strategies.

Table 2. Time: Year One Implementation Status Update

Short-term goals/strategies	Key successes	Key challenges
Provide high quality OST opportunities for LIFT students	• A partnership with Building Educated Leaders for Life[53] provided curriculum-aligned summer programming to 1,700 K-8 students for six weeks prior to 2012-2013 school year.	• The Freedom Schools[54] partnership served roughly 500 K-8 students in summer 2012, but was not renewed for Year Two due to misalignment with LIFT school curriculums.
Obtain approval for the CLC in LIFT Schools	• The LIFT Zone obtained approval from the state of NC to initiate two different CLCs at four LIFT schools beginning in 2013-14.	• Limited funding prevented Continuous Learning Calendar implementation at all schools that requested the new calendars.
Provide off-track WCHS students with opportunities for credit recovery	• The LIFT Academy[55] and a blended-learning curriculum provided credit recovery opportunities for students at WCHS.	• The credit recovery needs of WCHS students are considerable.[56]
Establish standards for high quality out-of-school, and select OST partners that meet these standards for serving students in urban settings		• Standards for quality afterschool programs that provide guidance for partnership development do not exist.
Ensure quality pre-school options for all four-year-old students in LIFT zone		• LIFT staff did not pursue this goal in Year One due to limited capacity.

Project LIFT was able to make substantial strides towards increasing the amount of time devoted to education in Year One, including the passage of the CLCs, the BELL partnership and the LIFT Academy.

[53] http://www.experiencebell.org/
[54] http://www.childrensdefense.org/programs-campaigns/freedom-schools/
[55] The LIFT Academy provides credit-recovery opportunities for students who are at least 2 academic years off-track.
[56] Our baseline analysis of WCHS students showed that roughly 30% of 9th graders, about 200 students, at WCHS earned 3 or fewer credits during the 2011-12 academic year, suggesting that a substantial number of students could benefit from opportunities to recover credits during their high school careers.

Each of these elements is in place for the start of Year Two and will be important building blocks towards full implementation of the model's Time pillar.

Along with these initial successes, the initiative also faces a range of challenges as it enters Year Two. In particular:

- **Lack of Staff Capacity and Resources.** Despite the talent and hard work of LIFT staff, they did not have enough staff or financial resources to meet all the Time goals proposed at the start of the 2012-13 school year. As a result, the LIFT staff did not establish a set of standards for high quality OST programming to inform their partner development in this focus area, nor were they able to pursue pre-school options for 4 year olds across the LIFT zone.
- **Limited LIFT Funding**. Implementation of the CLCs for the 2013-14 school year cost approximately $2.5 million; and the estimated cost for the CLC at the four LIFT schools over the remainder of the initiative is projected at $11.7 million.[57] There were not enough available funds to implement the CLCs in every LIFT school that requested the new academic calendars. Some principals and teachers expressed disappointment that their LIFT school could not convert to a CLC, and a handful of teachers expressed concern that if their school did not adopt a CLC (and future LIFT strategies) they might be perceived as "less than a true LIFT school."

What to Watch For

Our second year of research could focus on extended time components related to the new school calendars along with issues related partnership quality and coordination, as presented below:

- **Continuous Learning Calendars.** How do the new calendar configurations affect:
    - Student Achievement: How does student achievement on NC state assessments vary across LIFT schools operating under different calendars?
    - Instruction: How do teachers' approaches to curriculum and instruction vary across LIFT schools operating under different calendars?
    - Attendance: How do student and teacher attendance patterns vary across LIFT schools operating under different calendars?
    - OST opportunities: How do the types of OST opportunities available to students vary across LIFT schools operating with different calendars?
    - Sustainability: What strategies will Project LIFT develop to sustain the CLCs beyond the end of the 5 year initiative?
- **LIFT Academy/Credit Recovery**. Does capacity in the LIFT Academy meet students' needs for credit recovery at WCHS? How does WCHS provide credit recovery support to all off-track students?

[57] These projected costs represent roughly 20% of the $55 million for the 5 year initiative, and included salaries and benefits for teachers at CLC schools, contracts with OST providers to provide intersession programming, along with transportation and other miscellaneous expenses.

3. Technology

The technology focus area is comprised of two pieces: access to technology, and supports for using the new technology. Table 3 presents major successes and challenges related to these Year One Technology goals and strategies.

Table 3. Technology: Year One Implementation Status Update

Short-term goals/strategies	Key successes	Key challenges
Increase access, training, and strategic use of technology for LIFT stakeholder groups (Principals, teachers, students, and parents in the WCC)	• A partnership between LIFT and the Knight Foundation supported implementation of OPLC Shape the Future Program (Grades 1-4). • The Microsoft Digital Inclusion Program (MSDI) made up to 500 low-cost laptops and a year of internet access available to LIFT parents. • A data-driven instructional tool, Discovery Education was identified and purchased to help LIFT principals and teachers align their teaching and instruction with the CCSS.	• The rollout of OLPC program was delayed from October 2012 until March 2013. • Roll out of the MSDI was mixed. • Parent attendance at MSDI laptop training was low. • LIFT schools did not have consistent and appropriate technological infrastructure to support new technologies.

In Year One, LIFT increased access to new hardware and software across the LIFT zone for school leaders, teachers, students, and parents. In addition, LIFT also provided training for stakeholders to effectively use the new technological tools to advance key strategies across the other focus areas. In particular, the implementation of Discovery Education, OLPC, MSDI, and will provide principals, teachers, students, and parents additional resources to support teaching and learning moving into Year Two.

Despite LIFT's success in increasing the use of Technology, the initiative still faces some key challenges as it enters Year Two. In particular:

- **Alignment of Technology Resources and Usage.** Alignment among access, training and use was not always consistent across the different technological resources; this was a particular challenge with the roll out of the OLPC program. In addition, LIFT staff explained that it was challenging to recruit LIFT parents to participate in the MSDI, and even more challenging to get them to attend technology trainings. In response to the early challenges with roll-out of the MSDI, a strategic decision was made to redirect roughly 150 of the 500 MSDI laptops to WCHS 9th grade students and their families.
- **Technological Infrastructure at LIFT Schools**. Teachers and principals suggested that the infrastructure at LIFT schools was often insufficient to support full integration of the new technologies into their everyday practice.

Despite some delays, access to technology across the LIFT zone increased during the school year, as many new technological tools were put into place. In the second year of the initiative, it will be important to provide LIFT principals, teachers, and students with the skills to successfully integrate these tools into their everyday work to support enhanced teaching and learning in LIFT classrooms.

What to Watch For

Our Year Two evaluation efforts could focus on the use of the new technology to advance LIFT implementation strategies by examining the following questions:

- **One Laptop Per Child**. How do teachers integrate OLPC into classroom-based instruction?
- **Data-Driven Instruction.** How do teachers and principals use Discovery Education to inform Data-Driven Instruction? What supports do teachers need to successfully implement Discovery Education to inform their curriculum and instruction?

4. Parent/Community Engagement

Successfully engaging parents and the local community is crucial for the long term success of Project LIFT. In Year One, the initiative sought to recruit, support, and encourage the involvement of parents, community volunteers, and community agencies in LIFT schools. Table 4 presents key successes and challenges related to these Year One Parent and Community Engagement goals.

Table 4. Parent/Community Engagement: Year One Implementation Status Update

Short-term goals/strategies	Key successes	Key challenges

Increase parent participation in school events	• The LIFT community engagement staff cultivated strong parent and community support for the implementation of the CLCs (via multiple feedback strategies – parent survey, community forums).
	• The LIFT community engagement staff developed a 'lifestyle marketing' engagement strategy, "The Pulse", to meet the WCC community and LIFT parents 'where they are'.
	  ○ Hosting events in non-traditional settings;
	  ○ Using the text-messaging platform, Textizen, to reach parents.
	  ○ Using a voice-messaging platform, Connect Ed, to reach LIFT parents/ guardians.
		• LIFT staffing to support parent and community engagement was insufficient until mid-year.
		• LIFT branding and communication for parent and community engagement events was inconsistent.
		• LIFT strategies for parent and community engagement were not always integrated, or consistent, with existing LIFT school strategies.

Meet the medical, social, and mental health needs of students and their families	• A partnership with Communities in Schools provided case-management support for students at all LIFT schools. • Presbyterian Novant Community Care Cruiser provided access to a mobile medical clinic to provide immunizations for LIFT zone students. • Colgate and the NC Dental Health Fund provided dental services to LIFT zone students.	• LIFT staff and partners had limited capacity to meet the socio-emotional needs of LIFT students.

The parent and community organizing in support of the CLCs in four LIFT schools marked a significant achievement for the LIFT community engagement staff. In addition, LIFT community engagement staff achieved a range of successes through an innovative lifestyle marketing approach to engage parents in the community. LIFT staff utilized a text messaging platform to reach LIFT parents, and used cell phone numbers as an up-to-date point of contact for parents to get the word out about LIFT parent/community engagement events. In spring 2013, Project LIFT also raised its profile in social media, launching a new website, Facebook page and Twitter account to represent the LIFT brand online. The parent and community engagement staff are also developing plans to tap into members of the WCHS National Alumni Association, and utilize community partners and neighborhood leaders to spread the word about LIFT. In addition, throughout Year One, Project LIFT was consistently featured in a range of local media reports that were generally positive.

However, at the end of Year One, parent and community engagement is still a work in progress. Moreover, with so much time dedicated to organizing efforts related to the CLCs in Year One, there were a number of community engagement activities that were underdeveloped relative to the other LIFT focus areas. As LIFT staff move into Year Two of the initiative, they will need to address the following challenges to fully engage parents and the community at large:

- **Addressing the Socio-Emotional Needs of Students and Families.** LIFT teachers and principals expressed concern about whether LIFT has the capacity to effectively work with West Charlotte community partners to meet the socio-emotional needs of their students and families. LIFT principals in particular noted the urgency in meeting those needs before any large gains in student achievement could be expected. Early attempts to develop and implement a coordinated parent and community engagement strategy were frustrated by competing priorities for LIFT staff time in other focus areas.
- **Overcoming a History of Low Parent Engagement.** As is often the case for schools serving disadvantaged students, LIFT schools have historically struggled with parent engagement. LIFT schools strategies to involve parents in school-based activities and events have historically been met with mixed results, and this pattern continued in Year One. In the first part of Year One, the LIFT staff also faced many similar challenges as they began to pursue their parent and community engagement activities.

In response to a perceived gap in their parent and community engagement activities, the LIFT staff brought on a second full time staff person in mid-year to support parent and community engagement. In early 2013, an entirely new parent and engagement plan was developed and began to roll out in the spring.

What to Watch For

Developing multiple communications and dissemination strategies for different audiences across Project LIFT has begun, and will need to mature as the project moves into its second year. Our Year Two evaluation of Parent and Community Engagement implementation could be focused in the following areas:

- **Clearly Defined Parent and Community Engagement Goals and Strategies.** Does LIFT clearly define Parent/Community Engagement goals in all LIFT schools and lay out strategies to meet these goals?
- **Integration of Zone and School-Level Parent and Community Engagement Activities**. How do LIFT zone Parent/Community Engagement strategies align with LIFT school Parent/Community Engagement activities?
- **Partnerships to Provide In-School Supports**. What partnerships does LIFT develop to provide in-school supports to meet the medical, social, and mental health needs of students?

Section III. Conditions Necessary for Successful Project LIFT Implementation

In the course of our conversations with LIFT staff, principals, and teachers, three key conditions were repeatedly identified as critical drivers of implementation across the LIFT zone: **Leadership, Capacity,** and **Communication**. These conditions were related to most of the successes and challenges highlighted in each focus area above. While we present these conditions as distinct, they are dynamically related to one another and must function together to support successful implementation of the initiative.

In the years ahead, the ability of the LIFT staff to drive key implementation strategies in each program focus area will likely depend on the degree to which each of these underlying conditions are in place. Below, we summarize the status of each condition in Year One. These summaries are provided to highlight the importance of each of these conditions in relation to future implementation successes, and are not based on a thorough evaluation of each condition in Year One of the initiative.

1. Leadership

Leadership is essential for complex educational reform initiatives like Project LIFT.[58] Strong and effective leadership at the zone level in particular is needed to provide guidance and strategic thinking across the initiative as a whole. Across the LIFT Zone, leadership is spread across the other LIFT staff, principals and teachers to guide implementation of the Initiative.

Project LIFT's unique institutional position within CMS provides the LIFT leadership with two key advantages:

[58] Bryk, A. S., Sebring, P. B., Allensworth, E., Luppescu, S., & Easton, J. Q. (2010). *Organizing schools for improvement: Lessons from Chicago*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

- Being situated within CMS provides district support for managing the complex range of administrative responsibilities associated with operating and maintaining nine school buildings, and providing general human resource supports to more than 400 instructional staff. This allows LIFT leadership to focus on implementation of the initiative.
- Autonomy within the LIFT zone allows the LIFT staff the flexibility to set goals, develop strategies to meet those goals, and identify, secure, and deploy resources to implement strategies without having to navigate an array of CMS approval policies and procedures.

As Year Two rolls out, the initiative will need to continue to build on these advantages to increase leadership capacity to successfully address the multiple and competing needs of the initiative.

2. Capacity

Successful implementation of Project LIFT requires capacity of two kinds: human capital and financial capital. LIFT leadership cultivates capacity to implement the initiative in a number of ways, as outlined below.

- **Skilled, Stable Staffing.** In Year One, the Project LIFT staff went through a number of transitions in response to staff turnover during the year, and suffered in early months from inadequate staffing.[59] By the end of the 2012-13 school year, the initiative was fully staffed to lead implementation across each of the four focus areas.
- **Professional Development and Support.** The initiative dedicated considerable time and resources to developing capacity through talent development in LIFT schools, particularly among LIFT principals. LIFT principals received support through targeted professional development, regular principal meetings, and discretionary funding to provide hiring and retention bonuses for their teachers. While principal supports were well targeted, supports for teachers were less consistent and not aligned with a unified LIFT strategy to support curriculum and instruction in LIFT schools.
- **Partnership Development.** LIFT developed an array of new partnerships leading up to Year One, while also leveraging existing partnerships to meet strategic implementation goals across the different focus areas. LIFT also continued to solicit new partners throughout Year One, and was successful in bringing unanticipated additional resources to the initiative. A number of these partnerships have shown promise in Year One, but identifying high quality partners, aligning them with the strategic goals within the initiative, and coordinating their efforts was a challenge, and will continue to require considerable staff time and energy.
- **Resource Development.** Throughout Year One, LIFT staff have actively pursued additional funding sources to support their implementation activities. Most notably, a grant from the Knight Foundation provided support for the implementation of the One Laptop Per Child initiative among 1st through 4th grade students. Yet resource challenges remain. Ongoing development activities to bring additional financial resources into the initiative will be critical throughout the initiative to support implementation and to plan for sustainability.

As LIFT moves into Year Two, it will be critical to continue to develop additional financial resources for the initiative, develop the capacity of LIFT staff, foster new strategic partnerships, and coordinate existing partnerships to successfully drive implementation. The ability of Project LIFT leadership to

[59] See Appendix B for LIFT staff organizational chart and timeline.

develop capacity within each of these areas will depend on effective communication among stakeholders at all levels.

3. Communications

The complexity of Project LIFT requires ongoing and consistent communication at a number of levels across a diverse range of stakeholders. LIFT leadership must be able to clearly communicate their goals, strategies, and priorities to their staff, LIFT principals and teachers, partner organizations, and the West Charlotte community. Since the initiative relies on the active participation of all the stakeholders to ensure its success, conveying how the efforts of each group of stakeholders contributes to the broader scope of the initiative is imperative. LIFT must also clearly distinguish LIFT-specific messages and priorities from CMS's district-wide policies.

Achieving consistently effective communication was a challenge in Year One. However, the clarity of Project LIFT's "90-90-90"motto resonated with LIFT principals, who reported staying focused on meeting these long term goals: 90% proficiency rates, 90% promotion rates, and 90% graduation rates by the end of the initiative. Continuing to refine the LIFT brand and develop strategies to communicate with a variety of stakeholders will be central to Project LIFT's success in Year Two.

Section IV. Summary and Preview of End of Year One Final Report

In the lead up to the 2012-13 school year, the LIFT staff faced significant challenges. The challenges outlined in this memo were often related, either directly or indirectly, to the lack of human and financial resources needed to effectively pursue every goal in each focus area. As a result, the LIFT leadership had to prioritize their efforts and strategically deploy their resources towards achieving a smaller set of goals. Despite these challenges, the LIFT staff were responsive to perceived gaps in their work throughout the year, and actively worked to address the fiscal and staffing deficits that they faced in Year One.

Throughout the course of the year, their work contributed to a range of successes across each of the four focus areas:

LIFT schools were fully staffed with mission-aligned principals and teachers; LIFT principals coalesced into a supportive professional learning community.

Instructional time was extended through partnerships with quality OST providers, and new academic calendars were put in place for four LIFT schools.

New technologies are now in place to support principals, teachers and students to improve their performance.

Innovative strategies to engage LIFT parents and the West Charlotte Community are showing promise.

Moving into Year Two, Project LIFT appears well positioned to continue making progress towards full implementation of the initiative.

Year One Final Report

The Year One final report, scheduled to be completed in February 2014, will be developed for all LIFT stakeholders: LIFT Staff, the LIFT Governance Board, LIFT principals and teachers, LIFT partner organizations, CMS administration, and the West Charlotte community. The final report will also be available to the general public. This report will include an updated version of this memo, along with findings on outcomes for students such as attendance, behavior, and academic performance. Table 5 provides a general overview of the Year One final report.

Table 5. Year One Final Report

Content	• Updated implementation memo • Survey responses to further contextualize Year One implementation • Revisions to August 2013 implementation memo based on LIFT internal feedback • Year One comparisons between LIFT schools and comparison schools along key measures of attendance, retention, behavior, and academic performance • Year One of a five-year "Performance Tracker" of LIFT schools' progress in meeting long-term goals

Data sources	• CMS administrative records
	  ○ Student, parent, and teacher surveys
	  ○ Student attendance, behavior, and academic performance
	  ○ Teacher experience, certification, EVASS, and attendance
	• Interviews
	  ○ LIFT staff
	  ○ LIFT principals
	• Focus groups with LIFT teachers
	• Observations at LIFT community events
	• Media scan
	• Document review
	  ○ LIFT internal documents
	  ○ State and local policy review

Delivery	• February 2014

Appendix A: 2012-13 Data Sources for Preliminary Implementation Memo

INTERVIEWS	
LIFT Zone Superintendent	WINTER & SPRING 2013
Executive Director of Research & Evaluation	WINTER & SPRING 2013
Executive Director of Teaching & Learning	SPRING 2013
Human Resources Specialist	WINTER 2013
Community Engagement Coordinators (n=2)	WINTER & SPRING 2013
Title 1 Coordinator	WINTER 2013
Principals (n=9)	WINTER/SPRING 2013
One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) Coordinator	SPRING 2013
TEACHER FOCUS GROUPS = 10 Focus Groups at 5 LIFT schools	
New Teachers (n=26) 5 focus groups	SPRING 2013
Veteran Teachers (n=26) 5 focus groups	SPRING 2013
OBSERVATIONS	
Quarterly Partner Meetings (n=5)	SPRING 2012- SPRING 2013
Community Meetings (n=2)	FALL 2012
Principal Meeting	WINTER 2013
DOCUMENT REVIEW	
Project LIFT Program Documents	ONGOING REVIEW
Online Media Coverage (n=112 sources)	JUNE 2012-JUNE 2013

RFA interviewed each current principal at the 9 Project LIFT Schools. RFA conducted additional interviews for West Charlotte High School, including the former principal, the current Vice Principal of Instruction, and the current Instructional Accountability Facilitator.

New teacher were not necessarily new to the teaching profession; but began teaching in a Project LIFT school during the 2012-13 school year. Veteran teachers taught in the Project LIFT school for three or more years prior to LIFT coming into the school. The teacher focus group sample was also mixed based on grade level and subject area taught, race/ethnicity, age, and gender. Teachers participating in the focus groups were chosen by administrators based on these characteristics and deemed to be strong practitioners who were likely to continue at the school, thus serving as good candidates for interviews during subsequent years of the evaluation. The sample included 20 "Irreplaceable" teachers and 6 Teach for America teachers. The school sample included 3 elementary schools with different school calendars: Statesville Road (traditional calendar), Bruns Academy (continuous learning calendar), and Thomasboro Academy (continuous learning calendar extended). RFA also conducted focus groups at Ranson Middle School and West Charlotte High School.

Appendix B: 2012-13 LIFT Onboarding Staff/Building Internal Capacity in Year One

The Project LIFT staffing structure includes existing positions within CMS, in addition to unique positions designed to create internal capacity for Project LIFT implementation. Figure 1B presents the sequence of onboarding and hiring Project LIFT-specific positions and when these positions were filled in Year One of the initiative. This figure is designed to show how Project LIFT went about building their own internal capacity and creating some staffing stability in Year One of Project LIFT implementation in 2012-13. We indicate when each position was filled, and if there was a resignation as was the case with the Executive Director of Teaching and Learning, or an expansion of staffing, as with the addition of a second Community Engagement Specialist in the winter of 2013.

Appendix C: 2012-13 Project LIFT Key Program Focus Areas Partners

TALENT PARTNERS	
Teach for America (TFA)	Provided corps members to work as teachers in L.I.F.T. schools
University of Virginia School Turnaround Program	Worked with the school leadership teams and the zone office to build internal capacity necessary to support and sustain the school turnaround initiative
New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS)	Provided leadership programs to develop talented educators and worked to foster conditions enabling school leaders to drive student achievement
Public Impact: Reach Extension Project	Focused on redesigning teachers' roles to enable top teachers to reach more students at Allenbrook, Ashley Park, Thomasboro and Ranson
TIME PARTNERS	
YMCA	Afterschool program at McCrorey YMCA
CMS: No Easy Walk	Gang prevention and character education program
Youth Development Initiative	Life skills, career training and mentoring for students at the LIFT Academy at WCHS
Building Educated Leaders for Life (BELL)	Academic support provided after school and during the summer
Freedom Schools	Provided summer enrichment helping children appreciate reading, increase their self-esteem and generate more positive attitudes towards learning *(did not renew contract for Year Two)
Johnson C. Smith University: Charlotte's Web	Mentoring, afterschool and summer programming with a STEM theme provided to 40 male students at West Charlotte High School
TECHNOLOGY PARTNERS	
One Laptop per Child (OLPC)	Provided XO laptops to 1st-4th graders in LIFT elementary schools
Microsoft Digital Inclusion Program	Provided 500 laptops and free internet access for one year to families at a reduced price ($150)
Ten 80 Student Racing Challenge: NASCAR STEM Initiative	Project-based STEM curriculum and professional development for 9th and 10th grade students based on NASCAR theme
Johnson C. Smith University: Charlotte's Web	Provided technology training to male students at West Charlotte High School
PARENT/COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PARTNERS	
Right Moves for Youth	Weekly group meeting, mentoring and case management
Larry King Center	Conducted an assessment of school needs and assets, including local neighborhood quality of life data and academic outcomes
Men Who Care Global Mentoring	Mentoring program for male students
Communities in Schools	Student support services for identified caseload

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