The Evaluation of the Teach For America Investing in Innovation (i3) Scale–Up

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Teach For America (TFA) is a program that program recruits and trains college graduates with strong academic backgrounds and leadership capabilities to commit to teach for two years in public schools in low-income communities. In 2010, TFA launched a major expansion effort, funded in part by a five–year Investing in Innovation (i3) Scale–Up grant, through which TFA plans to increase the size of its teacher corps by more than 80 percent by September 2014, with the goal of placing 13,500 first– and second–year corps members in classrooms by the 2014–2015 school year.

TFA has contracted with Mathematica Policy Research to rigorously assess the effectiveness of elementary school TFA teachers recruited in the first two years of the i3 scale–up. Under the study’s experimental design, students in a given grade and school will be randomly assigned to a TFA teacher or a non–TFA teacher. A comparison of test scores from the two groups of students at the end of the year will provide an estimate of the TFA teachers’ impact on student achievement relative to non–TFA teachers in the same schools and grades.

TFA is also interested in its effectiveness among particular subgroups of teachers and students, including early childhood teachers, lower elementary school teachers, and upper elementary school teachers, as well as the impact of TFA elementary school teachers relative to novice non–TFA teachers. Because sample sizes for these subgroups will be more limited than those for the full sample, we have designated these analyses as exploratory.

In this presentation, we focus on some of the key design issues for this evaluation, including how to focus our data collection efforts to maximize the precision of the estimates within the budget for the evaluation, how to conduct the subgroup analyses requested by TFA, how to aggregate results for teachers over grades prekindergarten to five, and how to weight the sample to address discrepancies between the characteristics of TFA teachers in our sample and the overall population of TFA teachers.