Abstract Paper 1

**Title:** Every Classroom, Every Day Intervention and Implementation

**Background**

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Background/Context:

Every Classroom, Every Day is the instructional improvement component of the First Things First (FTF) approach to school reform. FTF—developed by the Institute for Research and Reform in Education (IRRE)—is a comprehensive educational reform model with three key strategies: (1) Small Learning Communities, which breaks large schools into smaller “schools-within schools;” (2) Family and Student Advocate System, which involves small groups of students who meet regularly with a teacher or administrator who serves as their advocate and liaison to their families; and (3) Instructional Improvement, which involves creating engaging learning activities that are rigorous for all students and aligned with the state and national standards. The proximal goal of FTF is to improve schools for teachers and students. The distal goal is to increase learning, with a particular emphasis on reading/writing and math. FTF has been evaluated in two quasi-experimental efficacy studies (Gambone et al., 2004; Quint et al., 2005), each concluding that FTF was very promising, with significant gains in some districts.

FTF’s Instructional Improvement strategy has evolved since it was first introduced and is now called Every Classroom, Every Day. It has been pilot tested in a small number of schools within the context of the full FTF intervention with a high level of success. For example, four high schools in Kansas City, Kansas implemented these enhanced strategies and saw rapid acceleration in their student achievement gains both in mathematics and reading on the state’s high stakes assessments (Kansas State Department of Education, n.d.). However, these findings must be interpreted with caution because they are non-experimental.

The current study was designed to evaluate the efficacy Every Classroom, Every Day (ECED) using a highly rigorous school-randomized field trial (S-RFT), in schools that are not implementing the full FTF reform model. Due to pressures of No Child Left Behind, prior to the start of this study, many high schools had already undertaken a school restructuring effort, but were looking for ways to systematically improve instruction. Based on the pilot work, Every Classroom, Every Day appeared to be a promising avenue to meet schools’ needs.

Purpose / Objective / Research Question / Focus of Study:

The current paper will describe the ECED intervention and implementation. The other two papers in this symposium will present the evaluation design, findings, as well as conclusions and next steps.

Intervention / Program / Practice:

Every Classroom, Every Day (ECED) was designed to provide 9th- and 10th-grade English/Language Arts (ELA) and math teachers, as well as instructional leaders, with two years of intensive professional development and curricular support. In keeping with the literature on effective math and ELA instructional reforms (Slavin et al., 2008; Slavin et al., 2009) and professional development (Desimone, 2009), ECED employs a broad range of strategies and components, including instructional coaches, professional development sessions that are content-focused and encourage active participation, and curricular and assessment support. Coherence is created by a continual focus on three instructional goals: (1) engagement of all students in their learning, (2) alignment of what students are being asked to learn with state and national standards and high stakes assessments; (3) rigor in how all students are taught and the level of content all students are being asked to master. These instructional goals—referred to as EAR—form the core of all of the ECED training, coaching supports, curricula, and instructional tools and processes. ECED has three major components: EAR Classroom Visit Protocols, ECED
Math, and Literacy Matters. This section describes each component as IRRE intended for it to be implemented in the treatment schools. Measurement of variation in implementation and strengths and weakness of the implementation during the evaluation are described in the last sections.

**EAR Classroom Visit Protocol.** The EAR Classroom Visit Protocol is a cornerstone of the ECED process. It is designed for use by school and district personnel, as well as technical assistance providers, to equip districts, schools, departments, instructional coaches, and teachers with up-to-date information about the quality of teaching and learning. It provides schools and districts with a common language for discussing and promoting high-quality instruction.

The EAR Classroom Visit Protocol is a 15-item observational tool completed by rigorously trained observers during and following a 20-minute observation. Typically teachers receive multiple classroom visits across the school year to gain a full picture of instruction and student learning in their classroom(s). Data are uploaded to a central server that provides reports at different levels (e.g., teacher, department, school, district) for use in professional development and reflective conversations. Classroom visitors use two items on the protocol to assess engagement: one measures the percentage of students who are on-task and the second measures the percentage of on-task students who are actively and intellectually engaged in the work. The first item is scored based entirely on observations of students at work. This second item is scored using a combination of observations and, when possible, brief conversations with students. To assess alignment, classroom visitors make eight binary judgments about whether the learning materials, learning activities, expectations for student work, and students’ class work reflect relevant federal and state standards and high stakes assessments, as well as designated local curricula. **Rigor** is assessed with five indicators (three binary, two percentages) that relate to both the cognitive level of the material and student work expected, and the extent to which students are required to demonstrate mastery of the content.

Instructional coaches and school administrators in treatment schools participated in four days of training on use of the EAR Protocol. Following training, each participant was expected to make at least five EAR Protocol visits per week. Data from these visits were uploaded to the secure server and used as a key source of information for ongoing teleconferences between school leaders and the IRRE consultant, IRRE site visits, and school-level discussions about improving teaching and learning.

**ECED Math.** The math component of ECED is not a curriculum but a system for delivering math instruction and assessing student progress that is specifically targeted to state and national math standards. IRRE consultants work with ECED Math teachers and coaches to identify key standards or outcomes that their students must be able to demonstrate on high-stakes accountability measures and to be successful at the next course level. Once these teams of teachers make critical decisions about what students must know and be able to do, IRRE consultants continue to assist with prioritizing and grouping those standards into meaningful sequences of skills and units of study referred to as benchmarks. Instruction in ECED Math courses is focused on a specific benchmark, phrased in student-friendly terms called “I Can…” statements. After each unit of instruction, each student should be able to say, for example, “I Can…find the slope of a line.” Once the initial curriculum work is completed, the teacher teams develop pacing guides, with ongoing support from IRRE consultants and local math coaches.

To ensure that all students have mastered the key benchmarks, math teachers develop a series of assessments that are administered at the end of instruction around a particular “I Can…” statement. Students must achieve mastery of at least 80% on each these five-question “benchmark assessment”. In addition, students are asked to show mastery again by taking
“capstone” assessments that integrate a small number of related individual benchmarks into a coherent application of logically related concepts and skills.

Students do not receive credit for a benchmark until they demonstrate mastery on both the benchmark and capstone assessments. When students do not master one or more benchmarks, teachers give corrective instruction and administer a second form. Students who do not demonstrate mastery on the second form, participate in the “Benchmark Café”, a dedicated out-of-classroom time and place for students to relearn material and take benchmark assessments. Additionally, summer school is offered for additional instruction and retaking of benchmark assessments. Students are graded solely according to the number of benchmarks they master during the grading period. Until students master enough benchmarks to attain a C (typically 70%) they are assigned an I (incomplete). If all opportunities to change that I to a C or higher are exhausted prior to attaining a C, the I is changed to an F.

ECED Math requires significant changes in the daily practice of math teachers. Such changes require support and feedback, which come in the form of summer institutes led by IRRE; math coaches at each school who make regular classroom visits, provide feedback and facilitate meetings; and professional development sessions led by IRRE consultants. The math coaches in each school devote at least .50 full-time equivalent to coaching. Math coaches are trained and supported by IRRE consultants, via site visits and regular conference calls.

**Literacy Matters.** Secondary students’ literacy skills—their ability to read, write, speak, and listen—form a fundamental building block for academic achievement in high school and life-long success. To meet these pressing needs, ECED provides a two year, researched-based, structured literacy curriculum called Literacy Matters, that supplements traditional English courses by using real world, expository texts and engaging activities which provide students with additional time and opportunities to strengthen their literacy skills and habits. Treatment schools agreed to enroll all of their 9th and 10th-grade students in this supplemental literacy course.

The first year of the curriculum aims to strengthen students’ abilities to comprehend and gather information, helping students to identify ways to make learning easier. Students refine critical thinking skills and learn how to work well with others through activities such as debates, exploring career interests, and writing speeches to express the change they want to see in the world. Teachers use a collection of interdisciplinary instructional strategies, called the Power 10, that equip students with transferable skills for comprehending, organizing, and remembering information in multiple disciplines. The curriculum includes seven project based, rubric-driven assessments, so that students receive feedback regarding mastery.

The second year of the curriculum aims to strengthen students’ abilities to share and communicate information with others, helping students to identify ways to express and personalize their knowledge. Using six traits of writing, instructional strategies, and relevant topics, students explore what writing is and who writers are, the art of sharing narratives, how to analyze the audience, and how to make their voices heard through oral, written, and visual communication. Teachers again use the Power 10 strategies and the curriculum includes five project-based, rubric-driven assessments.

When schools start participating in ECED, the literacy curriculum is new for all teachers and many of the Power 10 strategies are also new, so teachers require significant support. As with ECED Math, supports for Literacy Matters teachers come in the form of summer institutes led by IRRE; a literacy coach at each school who makes regular classroom visits, provides feedback, and facilitates meetings; and professional development sessions led by IRRE consultants. As with math, Literacy Coach devotes at least .50 full-time equivalent to coaching
and are trained and supported by IRRE consultants, via site visits and regular conference calls.

**Measuring Variation in Implementation:**

As with any school-level intervention, schools in the treatment condition varied with regard to how faithfully they implemented the ECED components. Variation in ECED implementation in the 20 schools taking part in the ECED Evaluation was quantified using a metric created for this study with a theoretical range of 0 to 100. There were four major steps involved in arriving at these scores: (1) creating indicators and operational definitions to define full implementation; (2) gathering data from multiple sources, including key-informant interviews, (3) reliably coding the interviews that provided the bulk of the information about implementation, and (4) combining all information to create final scores, using weights determined by IRRE. These steps are similar to the first four steps advocated by Hulleman, Rimm-Kaufman, and Abry (2013), although our data collection was somewhat less structured. We address their fifth step—linking the measure of implementation to outcomes—in the other papers in this symposium. Although control schools received no supports from IRRE, they could have using some practices similar to those supported by ECED. Thus, identical implementation data were collected in treatment and control schools and comparable scores were created. The values in the treatment condition were much higher than in the control, but there is variation within each condition (treatment: *mean*: 65.20, *SD* = 14.42; control: *mean*: 10.92, *SD* = 2.15; *t*(19) = 11.77, *p* < .001).

**Implementation Strengths and Weaknesses:**

In general, the treatment high schools that participated in ECED for two years implemented ECED’s math components fairly successfully. All organized instruction around the “I Can…” statements and implemented the benchmarking and capstone assessment system. Most used the mastery grading system and all had some system in place to help struggling students. The deployment of the math coach was less successful, with only about one-third of schools reporting that they had a math coach who actually spent the recommended .50 FTE on coaching. Likewise, the treatment schools implemented the ECED Literacy components fairly successfully. All offered the ECED Literacy course both years; however two schools only had time in student schedules to offer the course for half of the recommended time. On average, treatment schools enrolled over 80% of 9th and 10th graders in ECED Literacy. Each year, teachers in about half the schools covered the full ECED Literacy curriculum. ELA coaching was stronger than math coaching, with about two-thirds of schools reporting that they had an ELA coach who devoted .50 FTE to coaching. Use of the EAR Protocols by school leaders to improve instruction was the weakest aspect of the ECED implementation, with schools averaging only about one-quarter of the number of visits recommended. There was virtually no spill-over or contamination of ECED into the control schools, although some schools did have math or ELA instructional coaches or held regular meetings of math or ELA teachers, focused on instruction, resulting in variation in implementation scores among control schools.
Appendices

Appendix A. References


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