

Evaluation of Georgia State University's CREATE Teacher Residency Program, Cohorts 3 through 5

A REPORT OF A QUASI EXPERIMENT
IN GEORGIA

The Collaboration and Reflection to Enhance Atlanta Teacher Effectiveness (CREATE) is a three-year teacher residency program that seeks to recruit, support, and retain a diverse, highly effective, and culturally competent educator workforce that is committed to working in high-needs schools and to improving student outcomes. This evaluation focused on the effectiveness of CREATE for three cohorts of pre-service and early career teachers from 2017–18 through 2021–2022 (Table 1). Using a quasi-experimental design, participants included CREATE residents and comparison subjects, all of whom began participation in the study when they were enrolled in Georgia State University's College of Education and Human Development (GSU CEHD). The study followed participants for three years. We assessed primary impacts after participants completed two years as teachers of record. Program implementation and the experiences of early career teachers were measured across the study years.

Critical Context

The school years, during which many of the outcomes for this study were measured, included a myriad of significant events and challenges for educators and students. Some of these include the following.

- the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in school closures and a shift to virtual teaching
- national calls to action toward racial equity and justice, led by the Black Lives Matter movement
- contentious political battles over what teachers can and cannot discuss or teach in their classrooms
- concerns about safety in schools and communities, due to ongoing gun violence and mass shootings
- significant staff shortages

These, among other challenges that educators have faced for too long, exacerbated existing inequalities in educational access and opportunities. This context is essential while considering results from any study taking place in education during these years. It is especially essential for a study of early career teachers and the mechanisms in place to support them in becoming equitable and effective teachers. We must also acknowledge and show our appreciation for the educators in this study who continued to show up and serve their students, as well as for their willingness to continue to engage in the study with us. We want to ensure that their experience and voices are represented here and continue to be heard.

Fidelity of Implementation

LEVELS OF FIDELITY

We assessed the extent to which CREATE was implemented with fidelity on five key program components: 1) progressive core classroom roles; 2) equity-centered professional learning (PL); 3) compassion-based PL; 4) multiple forms of mentorship; and 5) Summer Resident Academy (SRA).

In measuring fidelity of implementation across cohorts and years, we found that three of the five key components of the CREATE residency program—progressive core classroom roles, equity-centered PL, and SRA—were each implemented with fidelity for all years in which they were measured. The compassion-based PL component was implemented with fidelity in the third year of programming for all three cohorts, but not in the first two years of programming. Additionally, CREATE provided multiple forms of mentoring to residents; however, this component was not implemented with fidelity because those serving as mentors did not attend all expected PL sessions.

Interpreting these implementation results requires acknowledging that schooling and CREATE programming during the 2019–2020 school year underwent many unexpected changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

CREATE-COMPARISON CONTRASTS

During their first year as teachers (second year of residency), CREATE residents are offered the opportunity to co-teach with another CREATE resident, and are provided the equivalent of a full-time teaching salary. Across the three cohorts, 80% ($n = 28$) of CREATE residents reported that they were co-teachers, while only 27% ($n = 14$) of comparison teachers reported that they were co-teaching or sharing their classroom with another teacher.

CREATE residents are provided equity-centered PL and compassion-based PL during their monthly cohort meetings, called Together Time. Across the cohorts and years, the majority of CREATE residents reported that these PL opportunities improved their capacity to be effective teachers, manage the challenges of being a teacher, and contributed to a greater sense of social capital and belonging. Cohorts 4 and 5 provided higher ratings of these PLs than Cohort 3.

TABLE 1. CREATE RESEARCH STUDY TIMELINE FOR COHORTS 3, 4, AND 5

	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Cohort 5
2017-18	Year 1		
2018-19	Year 2	Year 1	
2019-20	Year 3	Year 2	Year 1
2020-21		Year 3	Year 2
2021-22			Year 3

Note. Year 1 = preservice teaching year; Year 2 = first year as teacher-of-record; Year 3 = second year as teacher-of-record

Equitable access and opportunities in schooling is centered in CREATE’s vision, mission, and programming. All CREATE respondents in Cohort 5 reported being at least moderately confident in their understanding of race- and equity-related concepts in schools, with 89% of CREATE teachers reporting that they felt very or extremely confident in their understanding, while 67% of comparison teachers felt very or extremely confident. Additionally, 78% of Cohort 5 CREATE participants reported frequently or almost always being encouraged to think deeply about race- and equity-related issues in their schools, while 44% of Cohort 5 comparison participants reported doing so frequently or almost always.

Prior to their first and second year of teaching, CREATE residents attend an intensive weeks-long SRA to develop social emotional competencies, pedagogical skills, content knowledge, and the confidence to serve as effective classroom teachers. Over 80% of CREATE participants (across cohorts) reported that SRA was more than moderately or very valuable to their practice as a classroom teacher. We note that the proportion of participants who reported that SRA was very valuable increases by cohort, with all participants in Cohort 5 reporting at this highest level.

During their first and second year as teachers, CREATE residents are provided trained instructional mentors and school-based mentors. CREATE residents consistently rated instructional

mentors as the most helpful support offered. In contrast, while 80% of comparison group teachers reported having a mentor in their first year as teacher, only 39% had a mentor in their second year of teaching. Participants were also asked about the value of receiving financial support from CREATE. CREATE residents receive a monetary stipend during Year 1, while they are student teaching. Seventy percent of CREATE residents (across cohorts) reported that they would have experienced significant financial hardship if they had not received financial assistance from CREATE.

Impact Findings

TEACHER SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL OUTCOMES

By the end of their second year of teaching, CREATE teachers reported more favorable levels of self-compassion, teacher burnout, and stress management and empathy related to teaching than teachers in the comparison group. These outcomes are theoretically posited to mediate longer-term outcomes of teacher effectiveness, retention, and student achievement. Specifically, CREATE teachers reported higher levels of self-compassion (Standardized Effect Size [ES] = .51, $p = .06$), and higher levels of stress management and empathy related to teaching ($ES = .34, p = .25$). On dimensions of teacher burnout, CREATE teachers reported lower emotional exhaustion ($ES = -.18, p = .52$), lower levels of depersonalization ($ES = -.27, p = .34$), and higher levels of personal accomplishment ($ES = .29, p = .31$). The effect sizes and directionality of effects are noteworthy; however, none of the results reached statistical significance (at significance level $\alpha = .05$). These outcomes are assessed towards the end of implementation to reflect maximum exposure. However, they do not reflect variability in responses across cohorts and over time, which provides additional context for results, especially for the period of program adaptations necessitated by COVID-19. For example, as part of descriptive exploration, we found the largest differences favoring CREATE for Cohort 5, which is the cohort that entered teaching

during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Typical year-end trends in mean scores by cohort are displayed for two of the scales in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

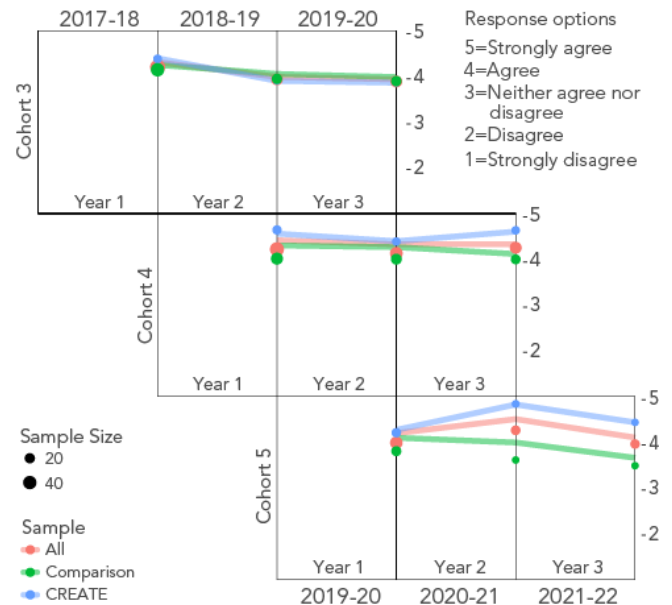


FIGURE 1. AGREEMENT WITH HIGHER LEVEL OF STRESS MANAGEMENT AND EMPATHY

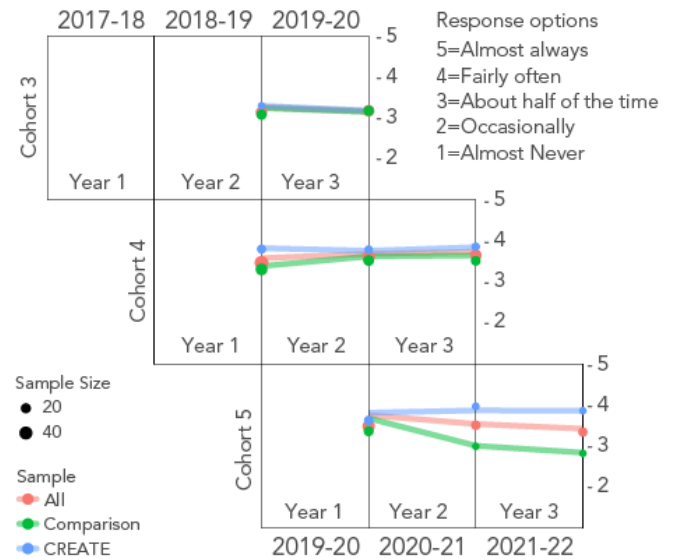


FIGURE 2. FREQUENCY OF SELF-COMPASSION

Note. The lines connect score averages for the consistent sample of 59 matched cases (27 in CREATE and 32 in comparison); the dots represent outcomes for all available teachers responding in a given cohort and year.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

We did not find an impact of CREATE on student achievement in ELA ($ES = -.18, p = .53$), as measured by the Georgia Milestones assessment in grades 3 through 8. Baseline equivalence was achieved on the ELA pretest ($ES = -.22$ SD). The need for within-grade and within-cohort matching of students severely limited the sample size and statistical power. The strategies were necessitated by a lack of vertical scaling of the assessment and to avoid possible bias from time-related confounds that could result from cross-cohort matching. Further, COVID-19 limited availability of test outcomes data from spring 2020, thereby further reducing the sample. For the ELA outcome, we began with available data from 38 teachers across conditions. With the limitations of context described above, the remaining analytic sample was five teachers (two in CREATE and three in comparison) with 81 students. There were no available outcomes for analysis of impacts on math, given the loss of a cohort due to COVID and the other restrictions of the assessment and matching requirements described above. As part of a follow-on grant, we are currently exploring options to collect achievement data from a wider grade range and/or larger sample to support a large-scale and fully-powered analysis.

Due to school closures and disruptions related to COVID-19, Georgia suspended the requirement to collect/submit teacher effectiveness scores. Therefore, we were unable to assess the impact of CREATE on this outcome. As part of the follow-on grant, we are currently moving toward conducting classroom observations for alternative measures of equitable and effective teaching practices.

TEACHER RETENTION

Among teachers with non-missing outcomes, 86% (37 of 43) of CREATE teachers and 84% (68 of 81) of comparison teachers were retained in teaching through their second year. The difference is not statistically significant ($p=.83$). Similarly, for Black educators, the rates of retention through the second year of teaching were 85% (22 of 26) for CREATE and 80% (20 of 25) for comparison, respectively, with the difference being not statistically significant ($p=.79$).

[A prior grant](#) demonstrated a positive impact of CREATE on uninterrupted graduation and retention of teachers, especially for Black educators, with most of the benefit accrued early through a difference in graduation rates. In the current grant, graduation rates were high for CREATE and comparison (>90%). This poses interesting questions about the differences in programming, recruitment, and hiring, between the years during which each study was conducted, and about how COVID-19 may have affected the dynamics of teacher hiring and retention.

About the CREATE Teacher Residency Program

CREATE is a three-year teacher residency program based in Atlanta Public Schools. Participation as a CREATE resident begins during a pre-service teaching year, while residents are completing their credential at GSU CEHD, and continues for three years through their second year of teaching as a credentialed teacher-of-record. During the residency, CREATE residents receive intensive support in the form of frequent meetings with their cohort, working with CREATE-trained mentors, a co-teaching experience during the first year as a teacher-of-record, and participating in summer and school-year PL to develop equitable and effective teaching practices.

The programming is intended to increase teacher collaboration through mentoring and involvement in collaborative learning communities, reduce the stress that often accompanies the early years of teaching, increase collegiality and teacher support, and increase opportunities and abilities to apply anti-racist and critical conscious practices in their classrooms and schools. It is hypothesized that these short-term outcomes are mediators of teachers' use of research-based pedagogical strategies that impact students' acquisition of knowledge and skills and the development of a flexibly-managed, safe, and culturally responsive environment conducive to learning. These teacher and classroom outcomes are, in turn, conjectured to lead to positive effects on student achievement and retention of teachers, particularly teachers of color.

CREATE's mission and vision has evolved since its inception in 2015. CREATE is moving towards its vision of developing "compassionate, skilled, anti-racist, educators for every student" (personal communication, 2022) by fostering collaboration around justice-centered practices, challenging oppressive schooling structures, and elevating liberatory practices in each of its PL opportunities, and to reimagine classroom spaces for deep joy, liberation, and flourishing.

Research Methods

We conducted an implementation study and quasi-experimental impact study to evaluate the impact of CREATE on teachers' reported levels of teacher burnout, self-compassion, and stress management and empathy, as well as on student achievement, and teacher retention. The design compared outcomes for CREATE participants with those of similar GSU CEHD participants who did not enroll in CREATE, as well as for matched samples of their students. The evaluation followed three staggered cohorts of study participants for three years each (Table 1). Impacts were evaluated using standard regression methods. Matched samples of teachers and students were evaluated for baseline equivalence across conditions.

At the time of recruitment, all study participants were 1) enrolled in GSU CEHD in either the Early Childhood Elementary or Middle and Secondary Education departments, 2) completing their student teaching requirement and planned to graduate from GSU CEHD at the end of their first year of the study, and 3) planning to teach in an elementary or middle school in Georgia public schools following graduation. Recruitment efforts resulted in 47 CREATE residents and 124 comparison participants across the three cohorts. The analytic samples differ across outcomes, depending on survey response rates, data availability, and study attrition.

We collected data from multiple sources, including participant surveys (at baseline and four surveys for each of three school years), CREATE program records, student demographics and achievement data from Georgia Department of Education, and self-reported and public records of teacher certification and employment.

Discussion

Since its inception in 2015, the CREATE Teacher Residency program has been awarded \$35 million in funding from state and federal grants and from private foundations to provide support to new and veteran educators. The programming offered has been evolving, but at its core, the work is "in service of reimagining schooling and classroom spaces and to move toward the idea of education for liberation." This core idea drives the research questions and methods.

The independent evaluation of the implementation and impact of CREATE adds to the evidence base for the program from a prior development-level Investing in Innovation (i3) grant. It also bridges the follow-on Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) grants (awarded in 2020 and 2022) that hold promise for scaling the program while focusing on its core mission.

This evaluation of Cohorts 3-5 demonstrates a predominantly successful implementation of CREATE, robust treatment-control contrasts on several program components, and trends towards

favorable impacts on key potential mediators of impact. However, COVID-19 curtailed the opportunity to carry out the intended evaluation of impacts of CREATE on important distal outcomes. Notably, in response to COVID-19, the state suspended collection of teacher performance data (including on project-critical dimensions of quality of instruction and educational environment). Several districts also reasonably prohibited the alternative of using in-person classroom observations. Further, suspension of state testing in 2020 limited the sample of students for evaluating impacts on achievement.

The study did not replicate the positive and statistically significant impacts of CREATE on teacher retention, especially for Black educators, as was observed in the previous i3 grant. This may reflect the effects of COVID-19 on GSU CEHD programming, recruitment and hiring mechanisms.

We look forward to continuing the evaluation of the CREATE program, and its mechanisms and impacts, through the recently awarded SEED grants. An important question with tremendous social value is about CREATE's potential to mitigate the pandemic's damage to teaching and learning. CREATE's commitment to equity-centered induction is especially vital in recovery, given the disproportionate negative effects of the pandemic on people of color and on schools that serve predominantly students of color. CREATE's model, and its commitment to produce and use research in critical and impactful ways, will contribute to the national conversation about how to effectively address challenges that schools and districts are facing in attracting and retaining qualified teachers. We are hopeful that the ongoing evaluation of CREATE continues to reveal supports and values that are effective in bringing about sustainable structures for teacher induction programs, in Atlanta and beyond.

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More information about this project, along with the full report and the appendices, can be found at <https://www.empiricaleducation.com/create/>.

Reference the report: Jaciw, A. P., Lau, S., Zacamy, J., & Lin, L. (2023). Evaluation of Georgia State University's CREATE Teacher Residency Program – Cohorts 3 through 5: A Final Report of a Quasi-Experiment in Georgia. (Empirical Education Rep. No. Empirical_GSU-7035-FR-2023-O.2). Empirical Education Inc. <https://www.empiricaleducation.com/create/>

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