



Evaluation of the Sanford Inspire Program
Teacher Preparation Analytics LLC
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the ninth in a series of evaluation reports about notable findings and project accomplishments for the Sanford Inspire Program. Independent evaluation is made possible by cooperation from Sanford Inspire Program leaders and team members; from ASU teacher educators and teacher candidates; from school and district administrators; and with support from the leadership and faculty of the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College (MLF TC) at Arizona State University.

This current phase of the Sanford Inspire Program continues to develop, produce, and disseminate on-demand modules for in-service teachers employed in schools across the region and for teacher candidates at Arizona State University and in the National University consortium of institutions. Completed modules and those in development are learning and professional development resources that target important teaching practices widely viewed as classroom challenges for large numbers of new and veteran teachers across the nation.

Producing On-Demand Modules

Evaluation activities behind this report include a recent opportunity to sit in on pilot testing sessions used by the Sanford Inspire Program to “test drive” new on-demand modules before final production and dissemination. Even though pilot testing does add time to the production process, direct observation indicates that these pilot tests are essential to optimize the user experience. Teacher candidates, in-service teachers, and teacher educators all gave feedback about module content, ease of use, and the amount of time needed to complete the module. The on-line world has plenty of clunky and junky resources that pay more attention to the needs of their developers than to their users. Competing for the limited learning time available to teachers and would be teachers puts a premium on products that are respected and valued by teachers and teacher educators because they enhance the user’s ability to improve learning outcomes for children. These goals as well as improvements made to the Sanford Inspire Program modules as a result of pilot testing justify the investment of time and resources in this phase of the development process.

Newer modules currently in production by the Sanford Inspire Program include three that address student motivation. A new report from the American Psychological Association (APA) explains why and how student motivation matters to successful teaching and learning. APA’s analysis of the strongest research about preK-12 teaching and learning found four key principles that teachers can use to increase student engagement and improve academic outcomes. This research speaks to the Sanford Inspire Program’s emphasis on teachers who are able to inspire their students in school and for life:

- “Students tend to enjoy learning and to do better when they are more intrinsically rather than extrinsically motivated to achieve.”
- “Students persist in the face of challenging tasks and process information more deeply when they adopt mastery goals rather than performance goals.”
- “Teachers’ expectations about their students affect students’ opportunities to learn, their motivation, and their learning outcomes.”

Research cited by APA indicates that students are more likely to enjoy learning and to achieve when they are intrinsically motivated because they are engaged in a task “for its own sake”. Teachers can inspire this intrinsic motivation by helping their students through a lesson component to learn creative problem solving in any subject area. This kind of student-driven creativity is fostered through teaching methods and lesson activities; teachers also can model creative approaches to learning. APA says that “creativity and innovation are the results of disciplined thinking,” which is why the Sanford Inspire Program’s careful approach to module development can translate a teacher’s desire to help students learn into inspiring instruction. Students are most likely to become engaged in learning and to grow academically and personally if their teachers have the skills to translate their own passion and love for children into effective teaching strategies tailored to the needs and interests of each child.

Recruitment Toolkit

The Sanford Inspire Program’s Recruitment Toolkit was developed from the team’s own experiences in seeking to inspire, inform and enroll future teachers. As a resource for other programs, the Toolkit is valuable as a set of materials that can help preparation programs to attract and prepare strong teachers. *Education Week* reported in late 2014 that enrollments in teacher prep programs dropped earlier in this decade between 5-40%, depending on the state (“Steep Drops Seen in Teacher-Prep Enrollment Numbers,” October 21, 2014). At the same time the National Center for Education Statistics projects continued growth in public school enrollments for many states and for the nation as a whole (up about 5% over the coming decade).

Preparation programs also face increased scrutiny from accountability efforts by states, accreditors, and the federal government. And their graduates are being employed in schools with more rigorous teacher evaluation systems than ever before. In this climate programs cannot simply enroll whoever shows up. Successful recruitment of top notch teacher candidates is important—poor quality graduates will hurt a program’s reputation and might even lead to sanctions against the program if the graduates are rated as ineffective teachers in the classroom. With help from the Sanford Inspire Program in its first phase, the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College benefited from the recruitment strategies and practices that have been brought together in the Toolkit. Other programs should find similar value in these resources.

Impact of Sanford Inspire Program on Progress in Education

Reports and developments in the teacher education field mean that Sanford Inspire Program modules and the Recruitment Toolkit tackle issues that are widely understood to be opportunities for improvement that can benefit the lives of children in this country. The rapidly changing demographics of our P-12 classrooms makes it ever more imperative that teachers have the knowledge and skills to manage classrooms successfully and productively, have the skills to motivate and engage students in high quality learning experiences, and enter teaching with the idea that inspiring student learning is a lifelong calling. This also requires that we do an effective job of recruiting people into the teaching field with the talent, commitment, and persistence to inspire children to their very best.

[For more on the APA report mentioned in this report, see “Top 20 Principles from Psychology for PreK-12 Teaching and Learning,” available at <http://www.apa.org/ed/schools/cpse/top-twenty-principles.aspx>]