

# SPARK/Future Forward: Building Evidence across Succeeding Evaluations

Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Public  
Policy Analysis & Management in Washington D.C.

Curtis Jones – University of Wisconsin Milwaukee

Patricia Marcus – Education Analytics

November, 8<sup>th</sup> 2018



## History of SPARK Early Literacy/Future Forward

2005 – SPARK was created by Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee (BGCGM) and piloted at one site in Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS).

2006 – SPARK was expanded to three MPS schools with funding from the United Way and AmeriCorps.

2010 – BGCGM received an Investing in Innovations (i3) Development grant award to expand SPARK to seven more schools (10 total).

2017 – Education Analytics received an Education Innovation and Research (EIR) mid-phase grant to expand to 15 mostly rural schools across 3 states under the name Future Forward.



## SPARK/Future Forward Approach

SPARK/Future Forward combines in-school tutoring with family engagement efforts to address the literacy needs of K through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students and families.

Each school has a certified teacher or youth serving professional who oversees the tutoring by community members.

In in-school tutoring, students are pulled out of non-core classes and taken to the SPARK/Future Forward room three times per week for 30 minutes. Tutors engage in a number of literacy activities with students including word play, reading a book at instructional level, writing sentences, and tutor read aloud.

For family engagement, SPARK/Future Forward sends home monthly newsletters, holds monthly family events, and has ongoing check-ins with all participating families.



## 2010-11 through 2014-15 i3 Study of SPARK/Future Forward

- Develop buy-in and trust between Clubs Milwaukee and MPS.
- Continue to modify the program model and hone implementation.
- Conducted two randomized studies of its impact.
- The first study found a small positive impact of SPARK/Future Forward on the reading achievement of participants.
  - Attrition was high.
  - SPARK/Future Forward was found to be ineffective with Kindergarten students.
- The second study found a significant positive impact on reading achievement, regular school day attendance and literacy.
  - SPARK/Future Forward had a much greater impact on lower achieving students.
  - SPARK/Future Forward had a significant positive impact across all grade levels.

## SPARK/Future Forward After i3

- Boys & Girls Clubs of America missed winning an i3 expansion grant in 2015.
- Education Analytics narrowly missed winning an i3 expansion grant in 2016.
- Education Analytics was awarded an EIR mid-phased grant in 2017 to expand SPARK/Future Forward to 15 mostly rural schools across three sites.



## 2018-19 through 2020-21 SPARK/Future Forward EIR project

- Education Analytics in designing scalable systems that will promote the sustainability of SPARK/Future Forward beyond the grant.
- Education Analytics is working to make SPARK/Future Forward more cost effective.
- This project again has a rigorous evaluation design that will involve a regression-discontinuity evaluation in 2018-19 and two randomized studies in 2019-20 and 2020-21.
- The evaluation will again focus on literacy and school attendance. For this grant, student social-emotional development is also an outcome.

## Partially as a result of i3/EIR funding SPARK/Future Forward...

- Has two studies included in the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) and determined to meet their design standards without reservations.
- Is featured on the Evidence for ESSA website as a program with a STRONG effectiveness rating. Prior to i3, there was no evidence of its effectiveness.
- Participated in meetings at the capital building, San Francisco, and at the national AmeriCorps conference.
- Was able to obtain foundation funding to continue SPARK/Future Forward in Milwaukee.
- Was able to obtain additional federal funding and foundation funding to expand SPARK/Future Forward to clubs in eight states.

Partially as a result of i3/EIR funding and evaluation requirements  
SPARK/Future Forward...

- Continues to exist
- Has strong evaluation evidence of its effectiveness
- Is a more effective program
- Better understands its program delivery model
- Is nationally recognized
- Has become a model program for community-based education organizations
- Is on the verge of scaling up to become an option to schools across the U.S.