Final Results of the Future Forward Scale-Up Grant

This report summarizes the final results of the Future Forward Education Innovation and Research (EIR) Scale-Up grant awarded to Education Analytics in 2021. The purpose of the grant was to support Education Analytics as it scaffolded supports around the Future Forward program, so that it could serve more schools and students efficiently and effectively. At the end of the grant, the scaffolding could be removed, and Future Forward would be independently sustainable.

As designed, this grant was to involve two pilot years during the 2022-23 and 2023-24 school years and two confirmatory impact years during the 2024-25 and 2025-26 school years. However, Future Forward and Education Analytics decided to end the grant at the end of the 2024-25 program year. So, while the original plan, as approved by EIR and documented in the Registry of Efficacy and Effectiveness Studies, was to combine the impact results from the 2024-25 and 2025-26 program years, the current study of the 2024-25 program represents the final report of the grant. Reported here are the final impact results of Future Forward on local reading assessments and school attendance.

The Impact Study

In 2021, Future Forward was awarded an EIR Scale-Up grant to further expand Future Forward to 24 schools across five states (Wisconsin, Illinois, Kentucky, South Carolina, and North Carolina). By 2024-25, only 20 schools continued to participate in the grant. The independent evaluation, conducted by the Office of Socially Responsible Evaluation in Education at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, involved a randomized control trial impact study with students randomly assigned to receive Future Forward and regular reading instruction or just regular reading instruction. Specifically, students were randomly assigned to receive Future Forward in either the fall or spring of 2024-25. Students randomly assigned to receive Future Forward also received the regular reading instruction provided by their teacher and any intervention supports provided by the school. The current study compared the school attendance and reading development of students randomly assigned to receive Future Forward in the fall of 2024 to those just receiving regular reading instruction. Considering the random study design, if we find that students in Future Forward did better than students not receiving Future Forward during the fall semester, we can attribute this to their participation in Future Forward.

Participants

Eligible students included kindergarten, first, second, and third grade students without an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that involved reading. In the fall of 2024, 870 families consented for their student to participate in the study. The evaluation randomly assigned 428 students to receive Future Forward in the fall semester and 432 students to receive just regular reading instruction, but receiving Future Forward in the spring. Random assignment was done within 184 classrooms. Each classroom included one to 16 consented students, with all but 20 having at least two. Random assignments were balanced so that roughly equal numbers of students within a classroom were assigned to receive Future Forward in the fall or spring

semester. Consented students within classrooms had a 50% chance of being assigned to receive Future Forward in the fall. No replacements were allowed for students who left the study. Ultimately, assessment outcome data were available for 754 students (377 assigned to receive Future Forward in the fall and 377 in the spring) and school attendance data for 674 students (334 assigned to receive Future Forward in the fall and 340 in the spring). This represents overall study retention of 86.7% regarding reading assessments and 77.5% regarding school attendance. Differential attrition, the difference in the attrition percentage between students receiving Future Forward and only receiving regular reading instruction during the fall semester, was small (0.8% in reading assessments and 0.2% in attendance).

Even considering the shortened length of the study, the results of the assignment and retention process, the validity of the measures used in the study, and the analytic strategies used to measure impact (Appendix) suggest the study results provide a valid and reliable measure of the impact of Future Forward on school attendance and reading development.

Results

The study results show that Future Forward did not have a positive impact on student school attendance rates or reading growth, as measured by local reading assessments (Table 1). Students receiving Future Forward during the fall semester did not demonstrate better school attendance or greater reading development compared to students only receiving regular reading instruction.

Table 1: Future Forward impact estimates

	β	*Robust SE*	*p*
Student school attendance rates	-0.32%	0.40%	0.416
Local literacy assessments	0.040	0.08	0.534

Notes: Local reading assessment results were standardized within grade level separately for each administration. The impact estimates (*β*) represent the effect size of Future Forward on literacy and the percentage impact in attendance with 1.0 indicating a 1% impact on attendance.

Scaling Up Future Forward

Through this grant, the number of schools receiving Future Forward increased to 20, extending the program to a larger number of schools and students. However, the results suggest that Future Forward was unable to realize an impact with the increased number of schools. So, while Future Forward was scaled up, it was not scaled up to be effective.

Education Analytics had identified several scaling up strategies and program scaffolds it would implement during the EIR grant. These were mostly abandoned. One involved identifying a school liaison who would be responsible for strengthening school partnerships and helping develop buy-in from school staff. Little progress was made toward this though. As the grant unfolded, enthusiasm and buy-in waned, and schools were unwilling to pay out of pocket to continue Future Forward after the grant ended.

Another strategy was to develop a data dashboard that sites could use to track implementation and impact locally. This never materialized. Education Analytics had planned to develop this but doing so proved too costly.

Another strategy involved providing greater flexibility to potential schools in how Future Forward was staffed. In previous grants, Education Analytics worked with a local Boys & Girls Club to implement and staff a local Future Forward program. In the scale up grant, Education Analytics provided schools the option of Education Analytics hiring staff, schools implementing the program themselves, or working with a local Club to staff Future Forward. All but four schools chose Education Analytics to hire and manage staff themselves. While this decision increased the number of schools who wanted Future Forward, and allowed Education Analytics to scale up Future Forward quickly, it also made the program much harder to manage and more expensive. Education Analytics had to hire over 100 staff to fill positions to serve local Future Forward programs. It also had to handle all the human resources issues facing these staff. All of this took a considerable amount of time and effort, effort that Education Analytics was not able to spend developing local program buy in and effectiveness. Further, the hiring of local Future Forward staff was considerably more expensive than Education Analytics had expected. This made the program more expensive. All else being equal, less expensive programs are more scalable and sustainable.

While Education Analytics ultimately did not scale up an effective version of Future Forward, that is not to say that Future Forward is an ineffective program. There is a great deal of evidence that Future Forward has had positive impacts on students and schools.[1,2,3] What the results of the current scale up grant suggest is that any future expansion of the program should be done more thoughtfully, with careful consideration for how to do it in a cost-effective way. The EIR Scale Up grant required Future Forward to be scaled up too quickly. Future scaling up efforts should be more measured about which schools to partner with, how to leverage local resources to staff programs, and identify other ways to reduce costs.

[1] Jones, C. J. & Christian, M. (2021). The results of a randomized control trial evaluation of the Future Forward literacy program: An innovative approach that pairs one-on-one tutoring with family engagement. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)*, 26(3), 185–209. https://doi.org/10.1080/10824669.2020.1809419
[2] Jones, C. J.. Reeves, M., & Li, D. (In press). The impact of one semester of Future Forward on reading achievement and school attendance. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)*.
[3] Jones, C.J., Reeves, M., Li, D., & Gilman, L. (2023). What is the sustained impact of Future Forward on reading achievement, attendance, and special education placement five years after participation? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*. DOI: 10.3102/01623737231182629

Appendix - Methods

Student demographic, attendance, and local reading assessment data were provided to Future Forward by schools. Two schools did not provide student demographic data, two schools did not provide local reading assessment data, and three schools did not provide school attendance data.

Local Reading/Literacy Assessments included AIMSWeb Plus in two schools, iReady in eight schools, and mCLASS in eight schools. All schools administered their local assessments before Future Forward started in the fall and roughly when participation ended in late January. Local assessments were administered locally as part of a school's standard assessment process.

- AIMSWeb Plus assessment is a norm-referenced assessment of early literacy. AIMSweb Plus has test-retest reliability estimate of .94 and has strong predictive validity of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills.[4]
- *mCLASS* Reading includes a digital administration of DIBELS Next. An overall composite score is calculated based on a student's scores on Letter Identification, Fluency, Phonemic Awareness, and Reading Comprehension that has strong concurrent validity with other measures of literacy (Good et al., 2004).[5]
- *iReady* is a web-based, assessment for reading/English language arts. iReady assesses Phonological Awareness, Phonics, High-Frequency Words, Vocabulary, Comprehension of Informational Text, and Comprehension of Literature. iReady has test-retest reliability of between 0.7 to 0.85 in grades k to 3 and 0.82 concurrent validity with state common core assessments.

Analytic Approach

We used general linear models (GLM) with fixed block effects to estimate the impact of Future Forward on local reading assessments and school attendance using the following equation:

$$Y_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(FF_{ij}) + \beta_2(Local_{ij}) + \sum_{m=1}^{M} \beta_{3.m} X_{mij} + \sum_{j=1}^{J-1} \beta_{4.j} Block_j + \varepsilon_{ij}$$

Where Y_{ij} is the regular-school-day attendance rate or winter local reading assessment score (standardized by assessment and grade level) for the i^{th} student in the j^{th} block; FF_{ij} is an indicator of assignment to Future Forward in the fall semester; $Local_{ij}$ is the standardized baseline local literacy assessment result (standardized separately by grade level and assessment); X_{mij} is the m^{th} of M additional covariates representing demographic characteristics (e.g. gender, free/reduced lunch eligibility, IEP status, English learner status, and race); $Block_j$ is the fixed effect of assignment block (classrooms); within each block, all students received the same literacy assessments; and ε_{ij} is the error term, clustered by assignment block.[6] Missing baseline data were replaced with dummy code replacement.[7] Students with missing outcome data were removed from each outcome analysis.

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[4] Pearson Education. (2008). AIMSweb. San Antonio, TX: Author.

[5] Good, R.H., Kaminski, R.A., Shinn, M., Bratten, J., Shinn, M., Laimon, D., Smith, S., & Flindt, N. (2004). *Technical Adequacy of DIBELS: Results of the Early Childhood Research Institute on Measuring Growth and Development (Technical Report, No. 7).* Eugene, OR: University of Oregon.

[6] Athey, S. & Imbens, G. W. (2016). The econometrics of randomized experiments. In the *Handbook of Economic Field Experiments*, 73–140.

[7] Puma, M. J., Olsen, R. B., Bell, S. H., & Price. C. (2009). *What to do When Data are Missing in Group Randomized Controlled Trials* (NCEE 2009-0049). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved online at: https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED511781.pdf