

Evaluation Brief on the Promise-Readiness Corps

Background

A key piece of the Pittsburgh Public Schools' (PPS') Empowering Effective Teachers plan is its Career Ladder Opportunities, which encourage teachers with a demonstrated record of effectiveness to work with students who need them most. Beginning in the 2010–11 school year, principals, teachers, counselors, and social workers from each of the highest need high schools joined together to design the Promise-Readiness Corps (PRC), a tightly knit team of teachers and staff that help transition 9th grade students as they enter high school, supporting them through their 9th and 10th grade years and delivering them to the 11th grade Promise-Ready. Following a pilot year in 2010–11, the PRC was implemented at five schools in 2011–12—Allderdice, Brashear, Carrick, Langley, and Oliver. Since the closing of Langley and Oliver at the end of the 2011–12 school year, the PRC has continued to be implemented at Allderdice, Brashear, and Carrick. Each PRC teacher earns an annual differential payment of \$9,300 and is eligible for an additional cohort award that is tied to student performance.

Each of the district's Career Ladder opportunities are funded through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) program. As required by this grant, PPS is working with an external evaluator, Westat, based in Rockville, MD, to evaluate the implementation and impact of its TIF-funded activities. Westat's evaluation work on the PRC has included two rounds of site visits that focused on various issues around implementation. Most recently, in spring 2013, Westat visited all three of the schools currently featuring the PRC to conduct individual interviews and focus groups with teachers serving in the PRC role and meet with the principal in each building. Westat has also analyzed student academic performance and behavior (e.g., attendance) data from each year of the PRC's implementation. This brief takes a look at some of the major evaluation findings on the PRC that have emerged thus far.

Findings on Implementation

Evidence from the site visits suggests that the PRC model was well regarded and that the implementation of the PRC was considered largely successful by both teachers and administrators across the participating schools.

- **The teaming component, in which teachers participate in regular team meetings to discuss individual students' academic performance, attendance, behavior, and other issues, was regarded as perhaps the most useful and impactful.** Teachers and principals felt that the teaming approach was very effective at identifying issues with students' academic performance, attendance, or behavior early on, which resulted in those issues being addressed and interventions being put in place before problem behaviors escalated or became ingrained in a student. Many teachers described how, in dealing with issues with a specific student, they were often able to draw on information from another team member who knew the student better or had made the most personal connection with that student.
- **Teachers also spoke very positively about the looping component, in which teachers follow their students from 9th grade into 10th grade, by describing how it resulted in enhanced relationships between teachers and students and made it easier for teachers to establish and maintain clear expectations for students.** For example, numerous teachers described how the beginning of the 10th grade year was made easier, and how they accomplished more throughout that year, because they did not have to spend time getting to know their students, establishing relationships with them, and setting expectations for behavior and performance. Moreover, some teachers described how knowing that they would be with students for an additional year led them to put forth more effort at connecting with individuals or addressing problems that in the past they would not have had to deal with because those students would have moved on to another teacher the following year.

A few challenges to the PRC's implementation were cited across the three schools:

- **Many teachers reported that the cohorts were not fully staffed, which resulted in teachers not having as much information as they could about individual students' performance and behavior throughout the school day.** As originally envisioned, the PRC teaming meetings were to include all teachers who work with 9th graders, but in many cases the number of 9th grade teachers participating decreased over time and ultimately led to only those teachers in the core subjects (e.g., reading/language arts, math, science) taking part in the meetings.
- **Some teachers described how they did not receive adequate support from administrators and other, nonteaching staff in their building, which in some instances led to a lack of follow up on specific issues with a student.** This, in turn, reduced the PRC teams' ability to resolve problems with individual students. As a result, some teachers and principals felt that the PRC was more effective at identifying problems with students' academic performance, attendance, or behavior than at actually addressing them.

Findings on Impacts

While the site visits revealed a combination of accomplishments and challenges around the issue of implementation, most educators across the three schools felt that their efforts at implementing the PRC model had resulted in positive impacts for students in the areas of academic performance and behavior. While educators' perceptions are an important factor, the impact of the PRC was examined more empirically through an analysis of students' academic performance, attendance, and behavior data. A

major focus of the data analysis was on changes in the proportion of students who are on track to be Promise-Ready (i.e., currently have a 2.5 GPA and 90 percent attendance rate).

More specifically, GPA data were combined with attendance data to determine whether each student met the criteria for Promise-Readiness. The outcomes of 9th grade students in the 2011–12 school year, which made up the first cohort of PRC students (i.e., not including the pilot year in 2010–11, which was excluded from the analysis), were compared to those of PPS students who were in the same grade levels and schools in 2008–09 and 2009–10 (referred to as the pre-group).

Higher rates of Promise-Readiness were found following the implementation of the PRC in 2011–12. As shown in Figure 1,

- When looking across the five schools that implemented the PRC in 2011–12, the proportion of students who were Promise-Ready at the end of 9th grade was nine points higher (55 to 46 percent) than the average for the same schools in 2008–09 and 2009–10.
- The proportion of students who were Promise-Ready at the end of 9th grade in the non-PRC schools remained unchanged at 45 percent.

Figure 1. Proportion of cohort 1 and pre-group students who were Promise-Ready at the end of 9th grade, by PRC school status

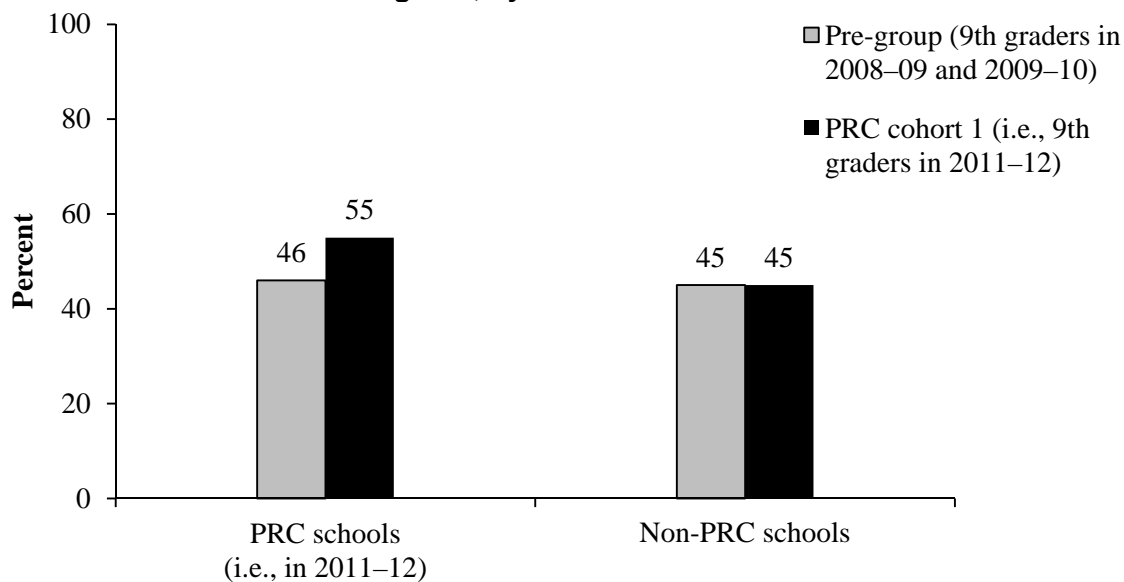
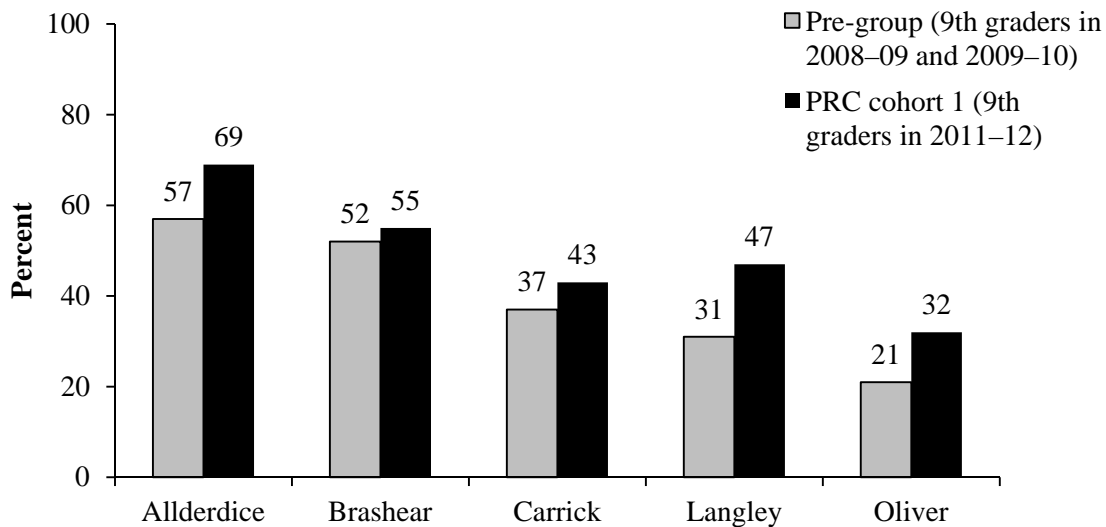


Figure 2 displays results for the 2011–12 school year at the individual school level and shows that the proportion of students who were Promise-Ready at the end of 9th grade was higher in all five of the PRC schools as compared to the pre-group, with differences ranging from 3 to 16 percentage points (not shown in figure).

Figure 2. Proportion of PRC cohort 1 and pre-group students who were Promise-Ready at the end of 9th grade, by school



Higher rates of Promise-Readiness were also found following the implementation of the second year of the PRC in 2012–13. As Figure 3 shows,

- When looking across the three schools that implemented the PRC in 2012–13, the proportion of students who were Promise-Ready at the end of 9th grade was nine points higher (46 to 55 percent) than the average for the same schools in 2008–09 and 2009–10.
- The proportion of students who were Promise-Ready at the end of 9th grade in the non-PRC schools was higher by four points (45 to 49 percent).

Figure 3. Proportion of cohort 2 and pre-group students who were Promise-Ready at the end of 9th grade, by PRC school status

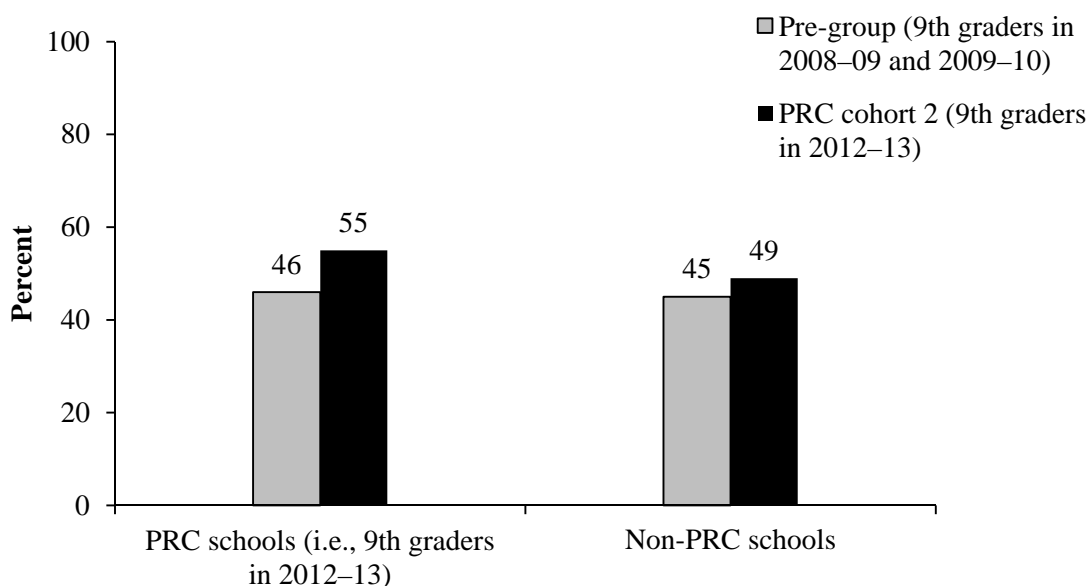
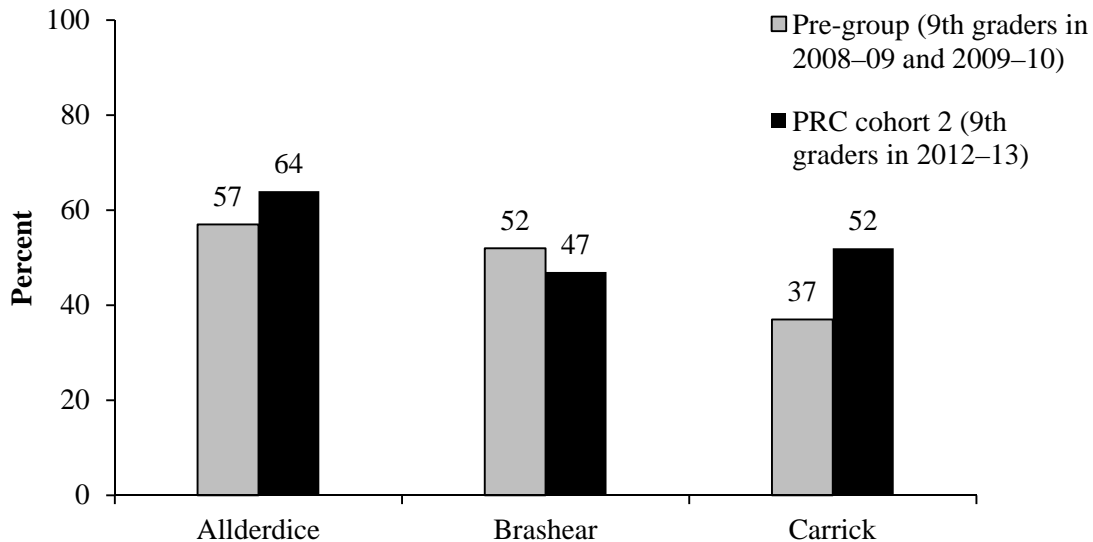


Figure 4 displays results for the 2012–13 school year at the individual school level and shows that the proportion of students who were Promise-Ready at the end of 9th grade was higher at two of the three PRC schools as compared to the pre-group, with Carrick 15 points higher and Allderdice seven points higher. The proportion of students at Brashear who were Promise-Ready was five points lower (52 to 47 percent) compared to the pre-group.

Figure 4. Proportion of PRC cohort 2 and pre-group students who were Promise-Ready at the end of 9th grade, by school



While these descriptive results show higher rates of Promise-Readiness at several levels since the implementation of the PRC in 2011–12, the results were also explored in a more rigorous way through regression modeling. This approach helps to control for a range of variables (e.g., students’ academic performance prior to 9th grade) that could potentially influence the outcomes being measured in the analysis. This, in turn, helps to determine to a greater extent the true effect of the program and whether the positive effects observed through the descriptive statistics are actually a result of the PRC, as opposed to changes in the make-up of the incoming 9th graders or other confounding factors.

The results of the regression models indicate the following:

- For cohort 1, 9th graders in PRC schools in 2011–12 were significantly more likely (i.e., based on statistical significance) to be Promise-Ready compared to students in the pre-group.
- There was no significant difference between the students in the pre-group and students in 2011–12 who were not in PRC schools.
- For cohort 2, 9th graders in both PRC schools and non-PRC schools in 2012–13 were significantly more likely to be Promise-Ready compared to students in the pre-group.

Moreover, a longitudinal regression model was used to compare levels of Promise-Readiness among students who were in PRC schools in both 9th and 10th grade (i.e., students who were in cohort 1 and continued on to 10th grade at a PRC school) to students who were in non-PRC schools in both 9th and 10th grade. Table 1 shows that the proportion of students who were Promise-Ready at the end of 9th grade and retained their Promise-Readiness at the end of 10th grade was higher in PRC schools (433/734, or 59 percent) than in non-PRC schools (276/602, or 46 percent). The results of the regression model shows that PRC students were significantly more likely to retain Promise-Readiness across 9th and 10th grade compared to non-PRC students.

Table 1. Number and proportion of cohort 1 students that were Promise-Ready across both 9th and 10th grade, by PRC school status

Student Grouping	Total Number of Students	Number/Proportion of Students Promise-Ready at the end of 9th grade	Number/Proportion of Students Promise-Ready at the end of 10th grade	Number/Proportion of Students Promise-Ready at the end of both 9th and 10th grade
Overall	1,336	794 (59%)	783 (59%)	709 (53%)
PRC Schools	734	489 (67%)	468 (64%)	433 (59%)
Non-PRC Schools	602	305 (51%)	315 (52%)	276 (46%)

Conclusions

Overall, the PRC appears to be having a positive impact on levels of Promise-Readiness among students in 9th and 10th grade. Cohort 1 9th graders in PRC schools were more likely to be Promise-Ready than pre-group 9th graders. Cohort 2 9th graders in PRC schools were more likely to be Promise-Ready than pre-group 9th graders, while cohort 2 9th graders in non-PRC schools were also more likely to be Promise-Ready than pre-group 9th graders. With regard to the longer term impact of the PRC, cohort 1 students in PRC schools who were Promise-Ready at the end of 9th grade were more likely to retain their Promise-Readiness at the end of 10th grade compared to students in non-PRC schools.