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### From Acorn to Seedling: Developing the Great Oaks Fellowship Program

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# From Acorn to Seedling:

## Developing the Great Oaks Fellowship Program



MARCH 2022

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## About CPRL

The Center for Public Research and Leadership (CPRL) at Columbia University strives to revitalize public education while reinventing professional education. CPRL conducts high-impact research and consulting projects for clients in the education sector and provides rigorous coursework, skills training, and real-world experiential learning for its graduate students at Columbia University and across the country. Since its founding in 2011, CPRL has trained more than 500 future leaders and completed 150-plus research and consulting projects for state agencies, school districts, charter school organizations, foundations, and advocacy groups, among others.

## About the Authors

Kimberly Austin is the deputy director of quality and improvement at CPRL and lecturer of law at Columbia Law School. Kimberly was the lead and co-lead of the Fall 2019 and Fall 2020 CPRL projects with the GO Foundation, respectively. Her research at CPRL includes implementation studies and formative assessment, covering topics such as afterschool programming, improvement networks, and school integration. Kimberly also oversees CPRL's knowledge-building and visibility strategy and supports the development of CPRL's staff. Before CPRL, she was at Relay Graduate School of Education and the Urban Education Institute at the University of Chicago where her research included teacher professional development and mentorship. She started her career in education as an early elementary teacher. She has a BS in journalism from Northwestern University and earned her MA and PhD in sociology from the University of Chicago.

Sangeetha Ramanathan is a project associate at CPRL and program alumna. She is also a current student at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs, pursuing an MPA. Before starting her master's program, Sangeetha was a research associate at the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) aiding the design, implementation, and analysis of data for multiple randomized evaluations conducted in India as well as studies related to the field of behavioral development economics. Prior to J-PAL, she provided legislative and economic research assistance to a member of the Indian Parliament and aided the revamp of history curriculum with a group of middle schools in India. Sangeetha earned has a bachelor of commerce with honors from the University of Delhi.

## Acknowledgements

The development of the GO Fellowship Program's strategy and continuous improvement system is informed by more than 50 interviews with Fellows, teachers, school leaders, program staff, and GO Foundation staff affiliated with the GO Fellowship Program, 100-plus observations of Fellows tutoring and mentoring students, and hundreds of survey responses from Fellows about their experiences. CPRL is grateful for the insights provided by these individuals.

CPRL also wishes to thank the graduate students who helped document the GO Fellowship Program and create a strategy and continuous improvement system. They are listed below in alphabetical order.

- Fall 2019: Monica Chan, Katie Dove (teaching assistant), Alex Lis-Perlis, Josh Malkin, and Alessandra Rangel
- Fall 2020: Bruna Credidio Camara, Yasmina Haddad, Josh Malkin (teaching assistant), Thea Van Gorp, and Shiyu Wang

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## Executive Summary



Ten years ago, the Great Oaks Foundation (GO Foundation) started the Great Oaks Fellowship Program (GO Fellowship Program), a whole-school model of high-dosage tutoring designed to help schools redress inequitable access to high-quality learning opportunities. Tutors in the program, known as Fellows, deliver tutoring in English language arts (ELA) and math to groups of 4 to 5 students during the school day, with students receiving a minimum of 3 hours of tutoring per week. Fellows work with all students, regardless of their academic performance, using instructional materials aligned with those used in the classroom. Fellows also mentor students, facilitate after-school programming, and help the school maintain positive relationships with families.

Fellows are AmeriCorps members who commit to 1 year of service. However, the GO Fellowship Program is designed to inspire Fellows' commitment to education with opportunities to explore teaching and enter the profession through the Great Oaks Teacher Residency. Even Fellows who leave education have a deep understanding of the communities they served.

Three years ago, the GO Foundation, along with site and program leaders, stepped back to examine the strengths and weaknesses of its program. They noticed opportunities to standardize the program by (1) developing a strategy grounded in promising practices for managing it and (2) better support-

ing the professional learning of Fellows. In Fall 2019, the GO Foundation partnered with the Center for Public Research and Leadership (CPRL) at Columbia University to identify those promising practices, incorporate them into a strategy, and create a formative assessment system to monitor the implementation and impact of that strategy.

The brief summarizes the GO Foundation's efforts to standardize the GO Fellowship Program. The bulk of these efforts began in January 2020—two months before COVID-19 was declared a pandemic in the United States—but there are some early and optimistic developments.

## Increased Standardization and Creation of Systems for Continuous Improvement

In collaboration with CPRL, the GO Foundation published a theory of action and logic model that reflected the experiences, ideas, and feedback from leaders, program staff, and Fellows. It incorporated key activities and outcomes from the logic model in two places. First, select activities were enshrined in the contract between the GO Foundation and schools, known as sites. This sets expectations for tutoring (e.g., frequency and type) and other programmatic features. Second, the GO Foundation defined activities core to Fellows' service with the term IMD: instruct students, mentor students, and develop a community. IMD provides a framework for structuring Fellows' service commitment, communicating expectations, and organizing their professional learning.

To support program improvement, the GO Foundation collects and analyzes a range of data. These data are also available on demand to site and program staff thanks to a dashboard created by the GO Foundation, called the Great Oaks Fellowship Program Data Portal.

## Encouraging Signs of Academic Impact

The pandemic disrupted teaching and learning across the United States, along with assessment systems. However, evidence of student learning that was gathered before the pandemic offers encouraging signs of the program's impact on student learning. In school year (SY) 2018-19, students enrolled at Great Oaks Legacy Charter School in Newark, New Jersey, the program's oldest and largest site, performed better on average than other students. For example, 56% of eighth-grade students at Great Oaks Legacy Charter School met or exceeded expectations in English language arts in SY 2018-19, compared with 44% of eighth-grade students attending nearby district-led schools.

## Intentional Efforts to Improve the Clarity of Mentorship

In SY 2021-22, the GO Foundation and leaders at two sites created pilots to study how mentoring experiences and practices affect student outcomes. The GO Foundation plans to integrate the lessons learned from these pilots into its system.

## Sharpened Focus on Family Connection as Key to Community Development

By partnering with CPRL, the GO Foundation learned that sites operationalized the "develop a community" component of the IMD model in different ways. Yet across all sites, Fellows contributed to positive family-school connections. As part of its system for continuous improvement, CPRL recommended that the GO Foundation assess the quality of those connections. Data from SY 2021-22 indicate that families with middle-grade students at Great Oaks Charter School-New York City view their schools favorably, with responses that are in the 99th percentile when compared with similar families not served by the program.

## Strengthened Professional Learning for Fellows

The IMD model provides the framework for Fellows' professional learning experiences. In recent years, the GO Foundation now plays a more robust role in the design of the summer training that Fellows receive before they tutor or mentor students, strengthening the connection between IMD and how Fellows think about their work. The GO Foundation also collaborates with sites to deliver ongoing professional development and assess and coach Fellows, which offers another opportunity to ensure alignment. It hopes these efforts improve Fellows' performance in the short term but also inspire them in the longer term to remain in education or other public sectors.

## More Opportunities for Collective Meaning-Making

Although the brief is promising, it closes with CPRL's recommendations for continued improvement that it hopes will help the GO Fellowship Program continue to strengthen its model. These recommendations privilege opportunities between the GO Foundation and sites to collaboratively interpret data, collectively problem-solve, and celebrate successes. CPRL also recommends the GO Foundation and its partners discuss the assessment tools they use to measure Fellow impact on student learning.



## Introduction

Founded in 2011, the Great Oaks Fellowship Program (GO Fellowship Program) delivers high-dosage tutoring designed to improve academic performance for all students, narrowing the achievement gap between students marginalized by U.S. school systems and their more advantaged peers. It also aims to enrich school communities through mentorship and service that increase a school staff's capacity to create a positive community.

Like those in other high-dosage tutoring programs, tutors in the GO Fellowship Program, who are called Fellows, meet several times per week with small groups of students for additional instruction in English language arts (ELA) and math as well as for mentorship. Unlike most other high-dosage tutoring programs, the GO Fellowship Program is a whole-school intervention. Fellows tutor all students, regardless of their academic performance, and use materials aligned with the content students are learning in their classrooms that month or week. When Fellows are not tutoring, they remain embedded in the school, facilitating after-school programs, contacting families, and helping school leaders and staff maintain the school's community.

To execute this model, Fellows, who serve for one year as AmeriCorps members, regularly collaborate with teachers to share information, review evidence of student learning, and discuss instructional techniques. This collaboration is one of the program's many professionalizing experiences that rapidly advance the Fellows' development as tutors and prepare them for careers in education and beyond.

The Great Oaks Foundation (GO Foundation) is the nonprofit entity that ensures program operations and quality. At the site level, it collaborates with schools to tailor the GO Fellowship Program to specific school contexts and helps manage the program. Across sites, the GO Foundation recruits and prepares Fellows.

Ten years after its founding, the GO Fellowship Program has expanded from a single school in Newark, New Jersey, to 17 schools in five states—thanks, in large part, to its partnership with AmeriCorps. As the program's largest and oldest site, Great Oaks Legacy Charter School in Newark demonstrates the potential impact of the GO Fellowship Program on students and Fellows. In school year (SY) 2018-19, the last testing period with publicly available data from the state, at least 50% of sixth- through eighth-grade students met or exceeded expectations in ELA<sup>1</sup>, compared with 35% to 44% for students enrolled in district-led schools.<sup>2</sup>

This brief, created by the Center for Public Research and Leadership (CPRL) at Columbia University, documents the program's history, the development of its current strategy, and early evidence of this strategy's impact. This work builds on the GO Foundation's two previous projects with CPRL that supported its continuous improvement efforts. Using interviews, observations, and surveys collected and/or analyzed by CPRL, as well as publicly available data, it documents the GO Foundation's efforts to strengthen the quality of the GO Fellowship Program through standardization and the strategic use of data.

The brief begins with an overview of the GO Fellowship Program's history and mission. Next, it describes the 2-year process of creating, testing, and refining a strategy for how the GO Foundation collaborates with schools to tailor the GO Fellowship Program. Then, it presents early evidence of the strategy's implementation and impact. The brief closes with recommendations for continued improvement.

1 To protect student privacy, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) does not report similar data in math for this school year.

2 NJDOE. (n.d.) New Jersey school performance report. <https://rc.doe.state.nj.us>



## Mission and History of the Great Oaks Fellowship Program



The GO Foundation's mission is straightforward—expand access to quality education through the GO Fellowship Program—but complex in its execution. At its inception, real-world experiences and research informed the design of the program. Great Oaks Foundation President Michael Duffy and Great Oaks Legacy Charter School Founder and Executive Director Jared Taillefer formed the GO Fellowship Program following their experiences with Match Corps Tutoring, another high-dosage tutoring program. “I had been at Match for several years,” Taillefer said. “My [initial] goal was to found a [grade] 6-to-12 program [with the] mission to send as many kids as possible to college.”

High-dosage tutoring programs often share similar aims, like increased grade-level proficiency, high school graduation, and college enrollment. However, the approaches high-dosage tu-

toring programs use to achieve those outcomes vary.<sup>3</sup> In general, these programs deliver frequent (at least three times per week), targeted, one-on-one or small group instructional support to students.<sup>4,5</sup> Critically, high-dosage tutoring is not homework help or test prep but an intentionally designed scope and sequence of learning that reinforces concepts and skills taught in the classroom.<sup>6</sup> The same tutor, who might be a teacher, a paraprofessional, or a volunteer, supports the same student or set of students for several weeks or longer. The stability of these relationships creates opportunities for mentorship, which is also a feature of some high-dosage tutoring programs.

Most evaluations and meta-analyses<sup>7</sup> of high-dosage tutoring programs find positive effects on attendance<sup>8</sup> and test performance.<sup>9,10</sup> These findings even hold for students marginalized by public school systems. For example, one study compared the academic performance of male students in grades 9 and 10 enrolled in a high-dosage tutoring program specializing in math with those who were not enrolled in the program. Both sets of students were identified by the authors as majority Black and Hispanic and eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.<sup>11</sup> The study attributed increased performance on standardized test scores of up to 0.31 standard deviations from the mean. To provide context, the authors note that the National Assessment of Educational Progress likens 0.27 standard deviations to a reduction of one-third the Black-White achievement gap. Another study estimated the impact of an ELA-focused high-dosage tutoring program as “approximately twice the impact of attending Promise Academy in the Harlem Children’s Zone, having a Teach for America teacher, or the average intervention designed to boost reading achievement for students over age 12.”<sup>12</sup>

3 Fryer, R.G., Jr. (2016). The production of human capital in developed countries: Evidence from 196 randomized field experiments. In *Handbook of Economic Field Experiments* (vol. 2, pp. 95-322). North-Holland.

4 Dobbie, W., & Fryer, R. (2011). Are high-quality schools enough to increase achievement among the poor? Evidence from the Harlem Children’s Zone. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 3(3): 158-187.

5 Robinson, C. D., Kraft, M. A., Loeb, S., & Schueler, B. E. (2021). Accelerating student learning with high-dosage tutoring. EdResearch for Recovery Design Principles Series. EdResearch for Recovery Project.

6 Robinson, C. D., Kraft, M. A., Loeb, S., & Schueler, B. E. (2021). Accelerating student learning with high-dosage tutoring. EdResearch for Recovery Design Principles Series. EdResearch for Recovery Project.

7 Nickow, A., Oreopoulos, P., & Quan, V. (2020). The impressive effects of tutoring on pre-K-12 learning: A systematic review and meta-analysis of the experimental evidence. National Bureau of Education Research. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w27476>.

8 Fryer, R. & Howard-Noveck, M. (2020). High-dosage tutoring and reading achievement: evidence from New York City. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 38(2): 421-452.

9 Meredith, J., & Anderson, L. M. (2015). Analysis of the impacts of City Year’s Whole School Whole Child Model on partner schools’ performance. Policy Studies Associates, Inc.

10 Reichardt, R., McClelland, A., Hill, J., & DeCesare, D. (2017). Expanding opportunities to successfully support early readers: A 5-year study of Reading Partners Colorado. Augenblick, Palaich, and Associates (APA) for AmeriCorps Evidence Exchange. [https://americorps.gov/sites/default/files/evidenceexchange/Reading%20Partners%20SIF%20Study%20Final%20Report%20%28July%202018%29\\_508\\_1.pdf](https://americorps.gov/sites/default/files/evidenceexchange/Reading%20Partners%20SIF%20Study%20Final%20Report%20%28July%202018%29_508_1.pdf).

11 Cook, P.J., et al. (2015). Not too late: Improving academic outcomes for disadvantaged youth. Northwestern University Institute for Policy Research Working Paper. <https://www.ipr.northwestern.edu/our-work/working-papers/2015/ipr-wp-15-01.html>.

12 Fryer, R. & Howard-Noveck, M. (2020). High-dosage tutoring and reading achievement: Evidence from New York City. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 38(2), 421-452.



When done well, high-dosage tutoring is a high-impact intervention. Its critics acknowledge this fact but argue that such programs are expensive.<sup>13</sup> For example, an impact and implementation study of Reading Partners reported that schools pay \$1,700 per student to cover the costs for school staff and facilities as well as the time and transportation of the volunteers who tutor students.<sup>14</sup> Although estimates vary based on the type of tutor and program design, education researchers Matthew Kraft and Grace Falken advanced a blueprint for scaling a whole-school model of tutoring that estimated costs at \$650 for elementary students and \$1,500 for high school students.<sup>15</sup>

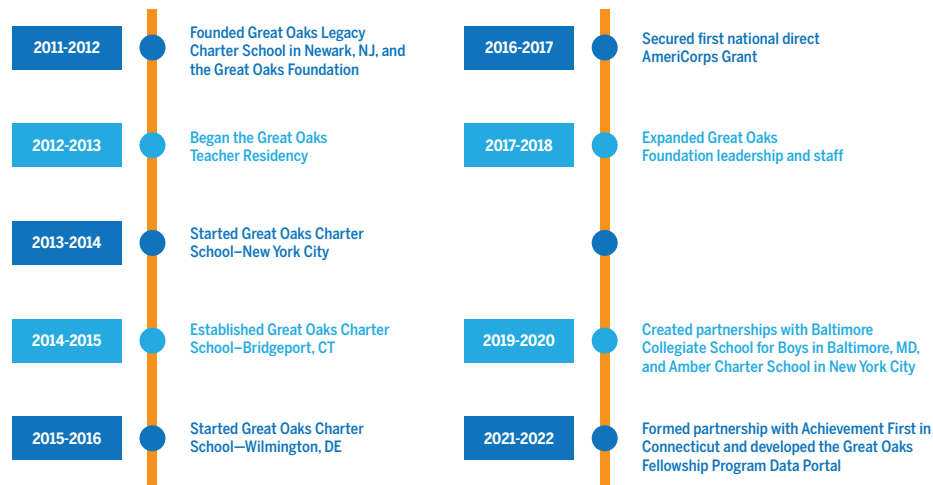
According to Lauren Perkins, the GO Foundation’s chief operating officer, the costs associated with the GO Fellowship Program fall within these lower cost estimates. She reported the program costs to sites as \$1,500 to \$1,700 per student each year. Perkins based these costs on expenses related to Fellow housing and the salaries of staff who manage the program at each site divided by the number of students in school. The research on and personal experiences with high-dosage tutoring motivated Duffy and Taillefer to increase access to this intervention. Beginning in 2013, Taillefer expanded the number of grades and schools operating under the umbrella of Great Oaks Legacy Charter School.<sup>16</sup> That same year, the GO Foundation helped establish the second site to offer the program, Great Oaks Charter School–New York City.

In 2017, the GO Foundation pursued and secured its first national direct AmeriCorps grant. This competitive award enabled the GO Foundation to increase its expansion efforts by recruiting more Fellows. By Fall 2019, the GO Foundation partnered with 10 schools in 4 states to deliver the GO Fellowship Program to about 2,750 students.<sup>17</sup>

“What’s extraordinary about our Fellows program is that—as a whole-school model—our cost per student is remarkably low for what schools receive in return. Fellows serve full time and provide at least 1,700 total hours of tutoring, mentoring, and community support over the course of the school year.”

—Lauren Perkins  
Great Oaks Foundation Chief Operating Officer

Figure 1: Growth of the Great Oaks Fellowship Program



13 Sawchuk, S. (2020, August 19). High-dosage tutoring is effective, but expensive. Ideas for making it work. EducationWeek. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/high-dosage-tutoring-is-effective-but-expensive-ideas-for-making-it-work/2020/08>.

14 Jacob, R., Armstrong, C., & Willard, J. (2015). Mobilizing volunteer tutors to improve student literacy: Implementation, impacts, and costs of the Reading Partners program. MDRC. <https://www.mdrc.org/publication/mobilizing-volunteer-tutors-improve-student-literacy>.

15 Kraft, M.A., & Falken, G. (2021). A blueprint for scaling tutoring across public schools. <https://edworkingpapers.com/ai20-335>.

16 Great Oaks Legacy Charter School was founded as Great Oaks Charter School. In SY 2016-17, it announced its merger with Newark Legacy Charter School to become Great Oaks Legacy Charter School.

17 National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.) Search for public schools. <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch>

## A Strategic Plan for a Whole-School Model of High-Dosage Tutoring



In March 2018, the GO Foundation hired Josh Thomases as its executive vice president. “The depth of his experience really helped to bring the schools together across sites and establish a more coherent idea [of the program],” Duffy said. Duffy recognized that without a core model, the program had proliferated into multiple variations across and even within sites. One school might have one Fellow paired with one or two students for tutoring sessions, or tutorials. Meanwhile, another school has more than five and even up to 15 students assigned to a single Fellow. Variations also existed in Fellows’ service outside tutorial—at one school they focused almost solely on academic support, but at other schools Fellows regularly facilitated conversations in advisory or led after-school programs.

The GO Foundation wanted to maintain a whole-school model that was responsive to the instructional core of schools and the needs and interests of teachers, students, and families. It also wanted to create opportunities for learning and standardizing systems, structures, and practices that best served students. With Thomases’ arrival, the GO Foundation could take steps to standardize its program as well as introduce processes for innovation and improvement.

To begin, the GO Foundation developed a strategy for how to work with schools to open, design, and continually improve sites. In accordance with AmeriCorps practices, Thomases and other GO Foundation staff created a theory of action and logic model that summarized the GO Foundation’s strategy for its work with site and program leaders and staff. In doing so, the GO Foundation codified a set of key activities for all sites to implement and outcomes for them to achieve.

These codified activities center on preparing and supporting Fellows who are ready to instruct and mentor students and develop a school community. GO Foundation leaders hypothesized that three core activities—instruct, mentor, develop (IMD)—determine the success of a Fellow. In turn, professional learning should be organized to develop knowledge and skills related to IMD. Additionally, this development builds a talent pipeline into schools and other public sector organizations as Fellows observe their professional growth. The Great Oaks Teacher Residency provides a supportive pathway into teaching, which GO Foundation now operates in partnership with the New York University Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development and the Relay Graduate School of Education.



## An Early Quality Review of the Great Oaks Fellowship Program's Strategic Plan



Driven by a commitment to standardization, improvement, and innovation, GO Foundation leaders wanted to test their strategy against the implementation of the program in schools. The GO Foundation engaged CPRL in September 2019 to conduct an exploratory study of the program's implementation in the four sites in operation at the time: Great Oaks Charter School–Bridgeport, Great Oaks Legacy Charter School, Great Oaks Charter School–New York City, and Great Oaks Charter School–Wilmington.

At that time, CPRL conducted 120 observations of tutorials and other events, interviewed 49 site and program leaders as well as Fellows, and analyzed more than 200 survey responses from Fellows about their experiences to answer the question: What does the implementation of the GO Fellowship Program look like across school sites? CPRL found that tutorials constitute the bulk of Fellows' responsibilities with variations in Fellow-student ratios but not frequency. Additionally, most Fellows contributed to the school community by maintaining regular contact with families. However, CPRL observed con-

siderable variation across school sites in how Fellows worked with and even conceived of their roles as mentors. By and large, Fellows had strong relationships with students, but those relationships were more personal rather than driven by goals related to achievement or social and emotional development. The GO Foundation used these findings, along with CPRL's recommendations, to refine the program's strategy.

The following fall, CPRL worked with the GO Foundation to create its continuous improvement system, which outlined evidence-based performance expectations for the program, named data collection tools and protocols, and recommended practices for monitoring and reflecting on annual performance. CPRL conducted additional interviews and focus groups to gather feedback on the performance expectations and tools. The continuous improvement system, now reflected in the Great Oaks Fellowship Program Data Portal, is aligned with the strategy developed following CPRL's implementation study in Fall 2019.

In Fall 2021, the GO Foundation asked CPRL to gather early evidence of its strategy's impact, growth, and areas for improvement. CPRL compiled four types of data from all sites in operation at the start of SY 2021-22. First, it gathered publicly available state exam outcomes, dating from SY 2018-19.<sup>18</sup> Second, CPRL reviewed responses to the "Self-Efficacy and Satisfaction Survey," which it designed to collect evidence of Fellows' perceived self-efficacy as tutors, mentors, and members of the school community, as well as satisfaction with the program. These surveys are administered at least twice annually, at the beginning and end of the school year. CPRL analyzed all survey responses from SY 2020-21 and beginning-of-year survey responses from SY 2021-22. CPRL also examined responses to the "Fellow Onboarding Survey," a survey introduced in SY 2021-22 that asks Fellows to report their motivations for joining the GO Fellowship Program and their perception of and satisfaction with the onboarding process.

Third, CPRL conducted follow-up interviews with site and program leaders. CPRL designed the interviews to capture what the program looked like during the pandemic. Lastly, CPRL reviewed documents provided by the GO Foundation.

<sup>18</sup> Although SY 2018-19 predates the finalized strategy, more recent state exam data are less readily available as several states canceled exams in SY 2019-20 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.



## Evidence of the Strategic Plan in Action



CPRL's analysis shows the GO Foundation has advanced efforts to standardize the program in order to better record and respond to evidence of Fellow development and student learning. It also reveals promising outcomes in the academic performance for its oldest site, as well as a positive impact on Fellows' career development. Lastly, the review shows how the GO Foundation and sites are working to strengthen areas for improvement related to mentorship.

### Increased Standardization and Creation of Systems for Continuous Improvement

The GO Foundation has made major strides toward codifying its model. Many of the activities named in the strategy are included in the agreement between the GO Foundation and sites. The agreement names stipulations related to Fellow-student ratio, frequency of tutorials, types of instructional supports the GO Foundation has identified as effective (e.g., close reading for evidence of the main idea in ELA or procedural fluency in math), and a mentorship relationship focused on developing social and emotional skills.

The GO Foundation has also expanded supports to train Fellows. Since SY 2019-20, the GO Foundation has used a

modified version of the Marshall rubric<sup>19</sup> to measure Fellow proficiency and growth as tutors. In SY 2021-22, the GO Foundation adopted TeachBoost, a Web-based application for collecting, analyzing, and storing classroom observations. This platform allows program leaders to more easily look across Fellows at their site to name strengths and areas of growth as a way to tailor Fellow training.

This level of standardization aids customization and continuous improvement by allowing GO Foundation, site, and program leaders to respond to site and school conditions. The organization of the GO Fellowship Program helps ensure the balance between alignment across sites and whole-school programming.

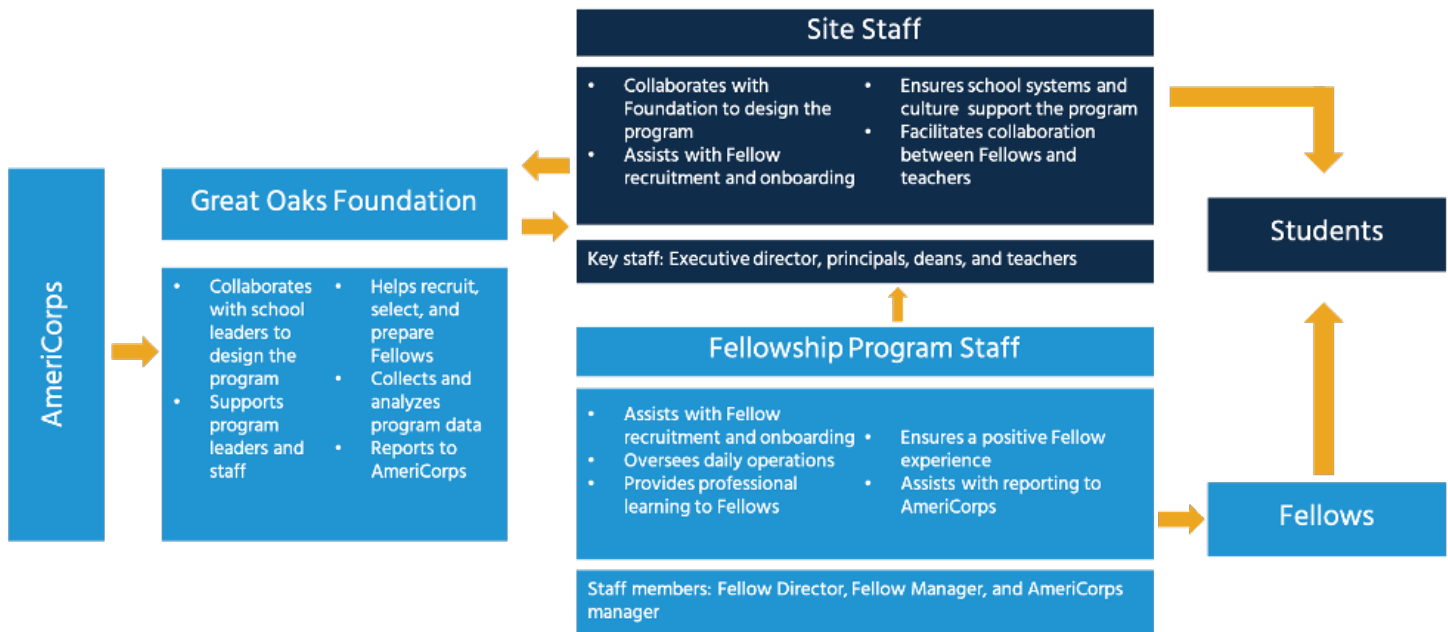


These standardization efforts are also aided by the organization's structure and how the components interact, which is depicted in Figure 2. In this structure, the GO Foundation interacts with and reports to AmeriCorps. The next set of interactions occur at the site level, which may describe a single school or a set of schools. Executive directors, principals, and other designated site leaders collaborate with the GO Foundation and program leaders (usually a program director and one to three managers) to design the program at a particular site. Day-to-day coordination of the program is largely left to program staff with support from the GO Foundation. These interactions support Fellows' development, which affects students in combination with school efforts. Throughout this process, the GO Foundation supports continuous improvement across sites, facilitating the spread of effective and promising ideas and practices, which is also supported by funding from AmeriCorps.

<sup>19</sup> Marshall, K. (2015). Getting teacher-evaluation rubrics right. In M. Tenam-Zemach & J. Flynn, *Rubrics Nation: Critical Inquiries on the Impact of Rubrics in Education* (chapter 11, pp. 167-184). Information Age Publishing: Charlotte, NC.



Figure 2: Organizational Structure of the Great Oaks Fellowship Program



### Continuous Improvement Systems

There are two GO Foundation–led continuous improvement systems. The Great Oaks Fellowship Program Data Portal provides on-demand access to data that describe each site’s progress toward performance expectations, using information from Fellows’ surveys and observation scores from TeachBoost. The GO Foundation also has arranged a series of quarterly conversations with site and program leaders to review data, problem-solve issues, and celebrate successes. Second, the GO Foundation is conducting six studies to explore promising ideas and strengthen existing practices. As an example, one study that began in SY 2021-22 aims to better understand the training that Fellows need to maximize the impact of close reading habits in ELA, which some Fellows teach in tutorial.

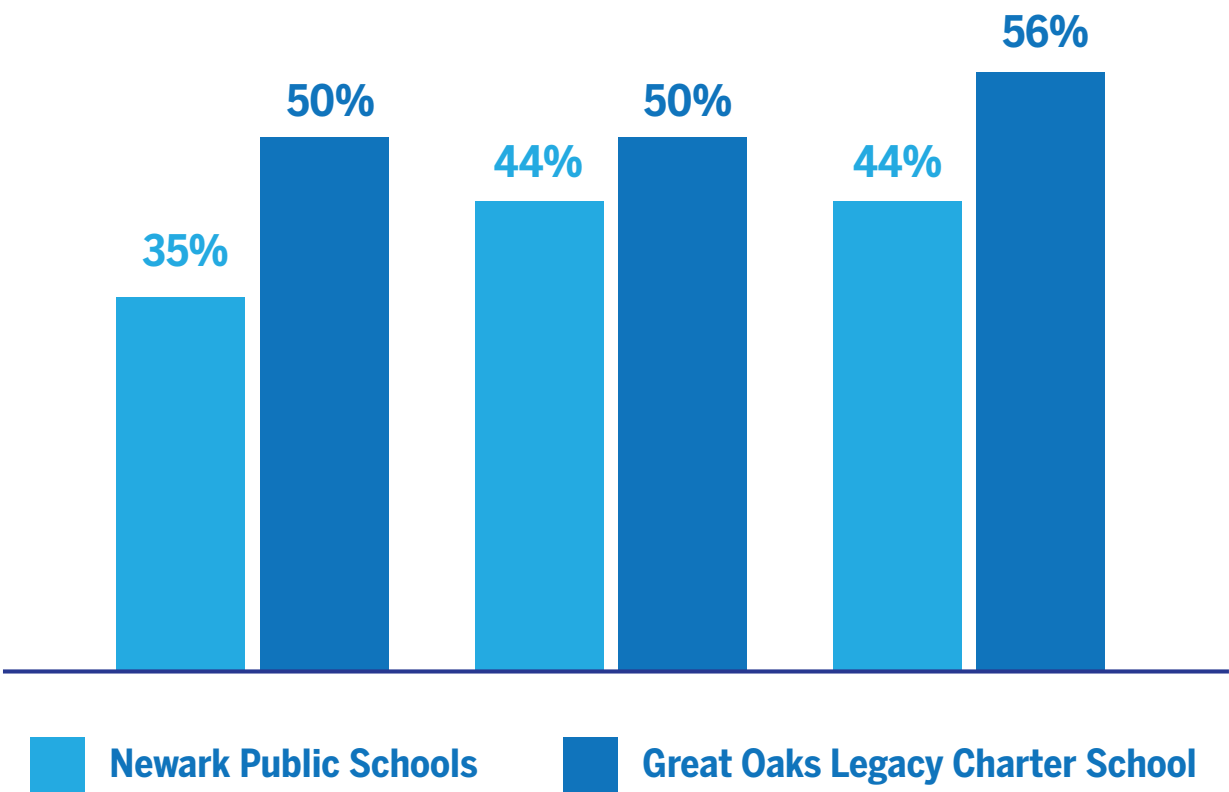
Already leaders have leveraged lessons learned within and across sites. For example, in its 2019 study, CPRL observed that tutorials with a clear whole-group opening and closing had fewer incidents of off-task behavior and a greater shared sense of purpose than did tutorials with ad hoc lesson structures based on student arrival time. In response to this finding, the GO Foundation encouraged sites to have one Fellow, typically a lead, open and close tutorials. By the end of SY 2020-21, 67% (115 of 171) of first-year Fellows reported that someone regularly opened and closed tutorials.

Encouraging Signs of Academic Impact

The GO Foundation has seen its tutoring program benefit students. GO Foundation staff and program leaders prepare and support the development of Fellows so that they become effective tutors. By the end of SY 2020-21, on average, nearly 70% (138 of 207) of Fellows agree or strongly agree that they felt prepared to “deliver all of the content I need to tutor students,” “explain the most complicated content to students,” and “get students to work well together.”

Some sites adopted practices before they were standardized by GO Fellowship agreement at the start of SY 2020-21, with encouraging results. For example, at Great Oaks Legacy Charter School in SY 2018-19, at least 50% of middle school students, who historically have been the focus of the GO Fellowship Program, met or exceeded expectations in ELA,<sup>20</sup> compared with 35% to 44% for students enrolled in schools in the surrounding district-led schools.<sup>21</sup> (See Figure 3.) Students at Great Oaks Legacy Charter School also demonstrated greater rates of proficiency in math.<sup>22</sup>

Figure 3: Middle Grade Performance in ELA at Great Oaks Legacy Charter School and Newark Public Schools, SY 2018-19



20 To protect student privacy, NJDOE has not reported similar data in math for this school year.

21 NJDOE. (n.d.) New Jersey school performance report. <https://rc.doe.state.nj.us>.

22 In the case of math, the NJDOE does not report grade-level outcomes for students who took the Algebra I, Geometry, or Algebra II end-of-course tests. This practice affected all the scores Great Oaks Legacy Charter School reported in SY 2018-19. Additionally, in this same school year, the eighth-grade results were not reported because the values were less than 20. As a result, they were omitted to protect student privacy.

There are encouraging signs of longer-term impact too. In SY 2019-20, Great Oaks Legacy Charter School had a 4-year high school graduation rate of 81% for its 2020 cohort and a 5-year graduation rate of 96% for its 2019 cohort. By comparison, the 4- and 5-year graduation rates for graduates of district-led schools were 81% and 79%, respectively. At Great Oaks Charter School–Bridgeport, 88% of the 2020 cohort graduated within 4 years, compared with 74% of graduates of the surrounding district-led schools. Of those graduates, 59% enrolled in a postsecondary programs, compared with 53% of graduates of the district-led schools.<sup>23</sup>



“As a first-year Fellow, my greatest impact on the school community was service....I saw the demand to jump in to serve where the need presented itself—whether that was being an assistant basketball coach, a hall monitor, or even a cheerleader for my colleagues.”

—**Tomanise Chalmers**

SY 2019-20 Great Oaks Charter School–  
Wilmington Year 1 Fellow and Current Middle  
School Dean of Students

In SY 2019-20, 88% of graduates from Great Oaks Charter School–Bridgeport did so within four years, compared with 74% of graduates from district-led schools.

23 Connecticut State Department of Education. (n.d.) EdSight. <https://edsight.ct.gov/SASPortal/main.do>

Intentional Efforts to Improve the Clarity of Mentorship

The broadest definitions of mentorship describe it as a supportive relationship between a young person and an older, more experienced person who is not a parent.<sup>24</sup> In the case of the GO Fellowship Program, leaders seek to recruit Fellows who are near peers to students (i.e., individuals closer in age to students than their teachers or principals). These near peers often share similar racial and ethnic identities. While the teaching force has long been viewed as mostly white and female,<sup>25</sup> this is not the case for Fellows. (See Figure 4.) Notably, in SY 2021-22, 34% of Year 1 Fellows (62 of 183) identified as male, whereas the most recent national estimate for male teachers in the United States is 24%.<sup>26</sup>

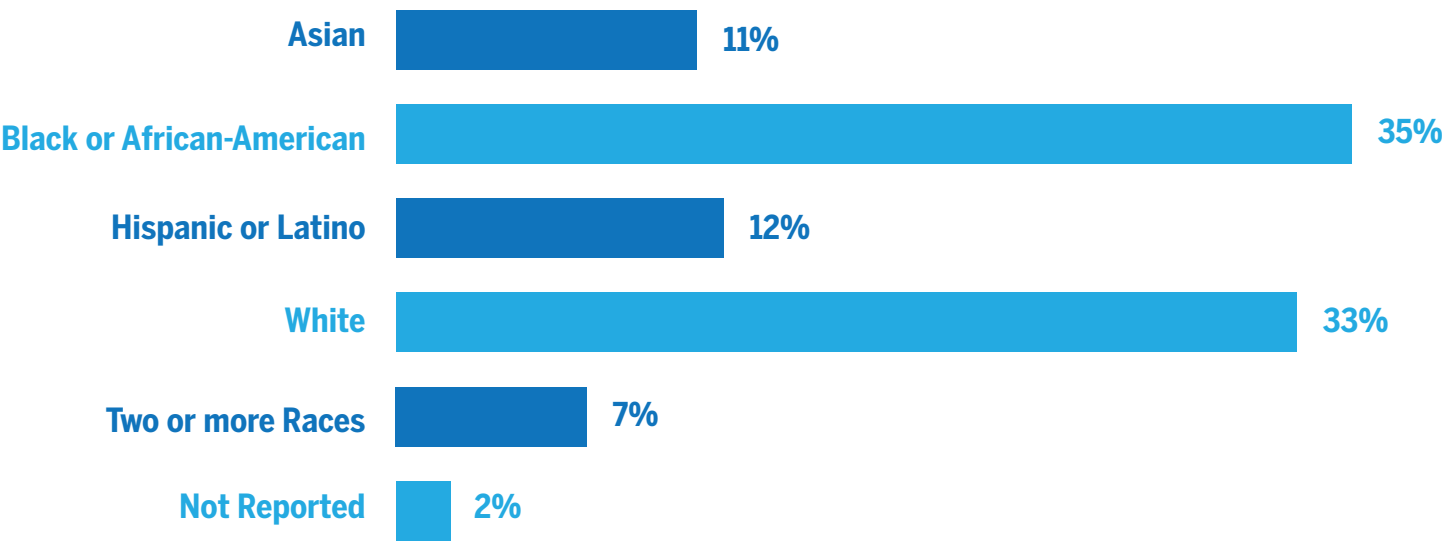
Across all sites, tutorial provides the most consistent opportunity for mentorship. But it also occurs throughout the day as Fellows check in with students, listen to their problems and concerns, and help them pursue their interests and talents. Fellows’ perception of these relationships suggest they do translate into supports for students. For instance, at the end of SY 2020-21, 83% (171 of 207) said they could at least “coach and mentor students.” Yet to date, the specific goals of mentorship and practices tied to those goals have not been defined across

sites. Having standardized some of the activities tied to tutoring, the GO Foundation is now working with Great Oaks Legacy Charter School and Great Oaks Charter School-New York City to pilot structures and practices that develop a growth mindset among a group of 200-300 middle school students. These standardized activities will also help the GO Foundation measure the implementation and impact of its strategy.

“In partnership with an outside organization, we have piloted training of Fellows in specific strategies and activities that help students build their learning mindset, resilience, and sense of agency and belonging. We are excited about the initial results from the pilot and are beginning the planning work to scale this effort.”

—Josh Thomases  
Great Oaks Foundation Executive Vice President

Figure 4: Fellows by Race and Ethnicity, SY 2021-22



24 DuBois, D. L., & Karcher, M. J. (2013). Youth mentoring in contemporary perspective. In Handbook of Youth Mentoring. SAGE Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA.

25 Will, M. (2020, April 14). Still mostly white and female: New federal data on the teaching profession. EdWeek. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/still-mostly-white-and-female-new-federal-data-on-the-teaching-profession/2020/04>

26 National Center for Educational Statistics. (2021). Characteristics of public school teachers. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/clr>.



## Sharpened Focus on Family Connection as Key to Community Development

The most recent partnership agreement names that Fellows will provide “regular touchpoints with families.” Although this is not reported in the “develop” portion of the agreement, it reflects the critical role Fellows play in strengthening the home-school connection. Across all its engagements with the GO Foundation, CPRL has consistently observed Fellows checking in with families by phone, by text, and in person to share information about students’ progress, listen to concerns, and problem-solve issues.

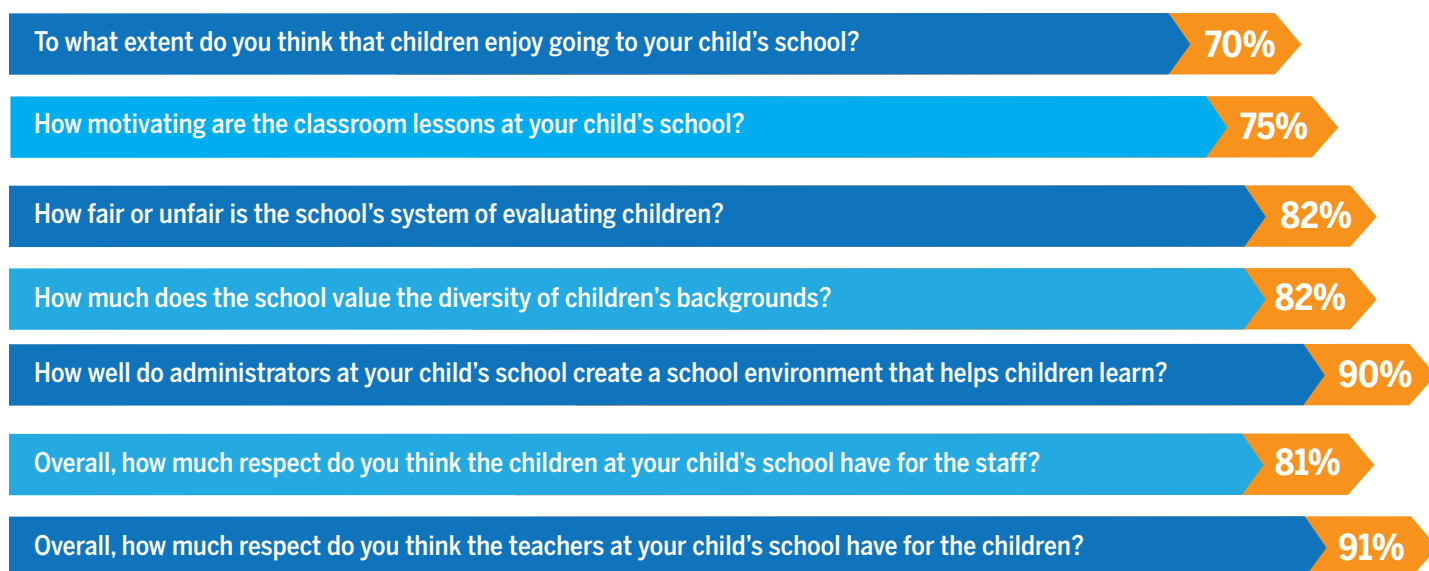
The agreement provides options for other ways Fellows might contribute to the school community, including welcoming students to school in the morning and facilitating after-school enrichment programs.

Fellows do not supplant the work of teachers and other staff but rather increase the capacity of the school, which was on display during the pandemic. At Great Oaks Charter School–Bridgeport, for example, Fellows collected information about at-home

access to technological devices and broadband. They also helped teachers set up and prepare for remote instruction. Kate Boyle, the program director at Great Oaks Charter School–New York City, described similar supports provided by the Fellows at that site, saying, “Fellows’ [role] became about staying in touch and making sure families had the resources they needed, like food, computers, technology, hot spot. Since [the GO Fellowship Program] did have those relationships between Fellows and families, they were definitely key in doing that.”

Early evidence suggests that Fellows are boosting the capacity of school leaders, teachers, and staff to serve students and families. At the beginning of SY 2021-22, the GO Foundation administered the Panorama survey at Great Oaks Charter School–New York City for the first time ever. It measures school climate, relationships, and belonging. Across a range of indicators, 82% of families with children at Great Oaks Charter School–New York City favorably viewed their relationship with school staff and their child’s school experience, placing these families in the 99th percentile, among similar families not served by the GO Fellowship Program.<sup>27</sup> (See Figure 5.)

**Figure 5: Family Perceptions of the Quality of School Relationships and Students’ Experiences at Schools Served by the Great Oaks Fellowship Program, SY 2021-22**



<sup>27</sup> The Fellowship Program serves students in schools located in urban settings. As such, the comparison group comprises families with middle school students enrolled in schools in urban settings.

## Strengthened Professional Learning for Fellows

Along with a living stipend, housing assistance, and an educational award, the GO Fellowship Program provides ongoing professional learning organized around the IMD model to build professional knowledge and skills. Since the introduction of the IMD model as a frame for professional learning, beginning of the year satisfaction with the relevance of professional development among Year 1 Fellows has increased from 43% in SY 2019-20 to 61% in SY 2021-22.

Fellows' professional learning begins with summer training and continues with at least monthly professional development sessions to develop new competencies. Fellows also attend weekly meetings with other Fellows, program staff, and teachers that allow them to develop academic concepts and skills. Fellows are also observed and evaluated throughout the year. Observations in tutorials provide the basis for weekly 1:1 coaching sessions with a mentor, coach, or other program staff.

Beginning- and end-of-year survey results from SY 2020-21 suggest Fellows see the impact of their professional learning in their readiness to facilitate instruction in tutorial. Using a composite of five indicators of preparation (e.g., explaining content, getting students to work well with one another), Fellow agreement increased, on average, 11%, with the greatest gains made in Fellows' preparation to "get through to the most difficult students."

For some Fellows, the program sparks or deepens their commitment to education. As a way to channel that passion and interest, the GO Foundation offers the Great Oaks Teacher Residency. Founded in SY 2012-13, the residency now operates in partnership with New York University Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development and Relay Graduate School of Education to provides a pathway into teaching.

In addition to their tutoring responsibilities, teacher residents spend one to two class periods per day practicing whole-classroom instruction alongside a mentor teacher. Even if Fellows do not enter the residency, they are inspired to remain in schools. Great Oaks Legacy Charter School reports that at the start of SY 2021-22 27% of its instructional, operational, and leadership staff were once Fellows.

"Our team worked really hard to connect current events with historical materials. [We] greatly expanded our Black history and women's history curricula and brought in outside speakers—all people of color—in careers [that interested students] to help motivate and cultivate a community of learning in our school."

—Michael Stephenson

SY 2020-21 Amber Charter School-Kingsbridge  
Year 1 Fellow

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Since the introduction of the "Instruct, Mentor, Develop" model, Year 1 Fellows' beginning of the year satisfaction with the relevance of professional development has increased from 43% in SY 2019-20 to 61% in SY 2021-22.

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## Future Directions

The GO Foundation leaders have taken steps to strengthen the GO Fellowship Program through strategic efforts of standardization and continuous improvement—at a time when school systems across the nation are still reeling from the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, the whole-school model offered by the program includes supports, especially increased instructional time with tutoring and social and emotional development through mentoring, that are in high demand.



### As the GO Foundation executes its strategic plan and continuous improvement systems, CPRL recommends the following:

- Develop protocols for deciding how best to deploy Fellows and assess those decisions. The GO Foundation has taken important steps to identify a set of instructional supports that Fellows are best positioned to provide in tutorial, but it remains unclear how the GO Foundation or program staff work with site leaders to make those decisions. The GO Foundation may want to articulate the information and evidence needed to determine whether, for example, sixth-grade ELA tutorials are focused on close reading or guided reading. Possible information includes access to the instructional materials needed to deliver a particular instructional support, teacher and student preferences, and evidence of student learning. CPRL also recommends at least annual touchpoints between GO Foundation staff and site leaders to reflect on the decisions about the program design at a particular site, using evidence of student learning, Fellow development, and school leader, teacher, and family satisfaction.
- Consider adopting assessments that better isolate the impact of the Fellows. State exams and other standardized tests can be used to study Fellows' impact on student learning outcomes, but these data more often pick up the impact of teachers too. The GO Foundation may want to procure or create its own assessment to measure the impact of the Fellows on student learning, which is a strategy adopted by other high-dosage programs.
- Identify a set of promising practices in mentorship. The GO Foundation is well on its way to implementing this recommendation with its current mentoring pilots. CPRL recommends revising its strategic plan, continuous improvement system, and partnership agreement to incorporate lessons learned and begin the process of standardization. With respect to the continuous improvement system, the GO Foundation is encouraged to make sure the data collection tools align with these new practices and anticipated outcomes for students.

- Consult with sites as they make decisions about Fellows' contributions to the school community. Other than the regular check-ins with families that Fellows provide, the GO Foundations and sites likely want to keep Fellows' contributions to the school community flexible so that Fellows can respond to unexpected needs. Yet it may be worthwhile to understand the conditions under which it is helpful to have Fellows assist with welcoming students to school, facilitating after-school programs, and providing Saturday homework help. In particular, after-school programs can be a significant time commitment for Fellows and may distract from their primary work of tutoring and mentoring.
- Create opportunities to reflect on and celebrate Fellow growth. The new continuous improvement system provides the GO Foundation and program leaders with on-demand, easily accessible information about Fellow experiences in the program. CPRL cautions leaders to avoid using these data only to identify areas of growth. CPRL also recommends using this information to locate Fellows in the development process (e.g., most Fellows begin the year as "improvement necessary" in this area but by the end of the year are "effective"). These data can also be used to celebrate milestones. Ultimately, these types of activities will help Fellows better see their progress and may encourage more Fellows to remain in education or the public sector.



In the last 3 years, the GO Foundation and site and program leaders have taken considerable steps toward standardizing and strengthening the GO Fellowship Program. Together they created plans and improvement systems, gathering feedback from a range of stakeholders and testing new tools. These kinds of investment in the design, implementation, and assessment of the program will likely help the program deepen its impact on Fellows and students.



