



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Impact of BetterLesson's High-Quality Professional Learning on Students' Academic Outcomes and Teachers' Motivational Beliefs



Can High-Quality Professional Learning Help Lead to More Successful Schools?

Professional development is commonly understood as a critical and necessary component of successful schools; however, there is often an unanswered question underpinning professional development: *Does it work? Does professional development improve students' academic outcomes or teachers' instructional practices?*

To interrogate this critical question, BetterLesson partnered with [LearnPlatform¹](#) to conduct an empirical study that examines the impact of BetterLesson high-quality professional learning (HQPL). Specifically, the study sought to understand the effect of BetterLesson HQPL on both students' reading and math achievement and on teacher motivation.

The study also served the purpose of fulfilling the [ESSA evidence requirements for Level III: Promising Evidence²](#), making BetterLesson an Impact-Ready high-quality professional learning provider.



Read the full study on our website:
betterlesson.com/evidence-and-research

Significance of Study

This study is important for a variety of reasons. First, we know from survey data that teachers often report a lack of access to relevant instructional expertise through their [professional learning](#)³. This disconnect can create experiences of disengagement or even resentment among teachers who believe that their professional learning is not applicable or impactful. Whether or not that disconnect is real becomes irrelevant if teachers' orientation to PL is one of frustration and distrust.

Conversely, if teachers are able to understand the empirical impact of a professional learning program on their instruction and on student success, they would be more likely to engage. This is also important because outsourced professional learning is a serious financial investment for districts. When a district is committing part of their budget to high-quality professional learning programs, they deserve to know the researched impact of those programs.

Finally, we know that teachers need individualized and actionable instructional coaching and training in order to successfully implement [new teacher strategies and resources](#)⁴. Without such support, teachers are less likely to facilitate shifts in their instruction that support student growth and learning.

Overview of Study

The study was conducted during the 2022-2023 academic year in a small district located in northeastern U.S. state. Students and teachers at both the elementary and high school level were included in the study to gain a more holistic understanding of the impact of BetterLesson's HQPL on student achievement and teacher motivation.

There were 10 elementary teacher participants (grades 1-6) and 5 secondary teacher participants (grades 7-12). All of these teachers identified as both white and female.

At the elementary-level, there were 158 student participants, and at the secondary-level, there were 1,110 student participants.

KEY STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS:

73% of students are from economically disadvantaged backgrounds

13% of students are in special education programs

34% of students read at grade-level

68% of students are white

18% are multi-racial/Hispanic

14% are African-American

Researchers used quantitative analytic approaches to analyze teacher survey data and student achievement outcomes as measured by NWEA MAP RIT reading and math scores.



Results

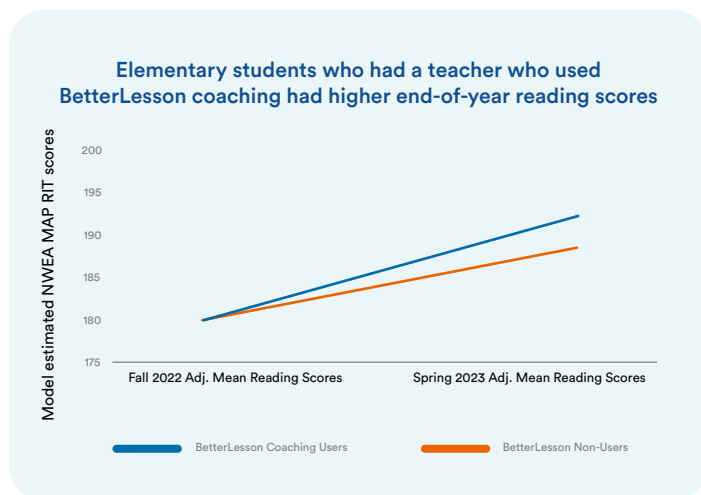
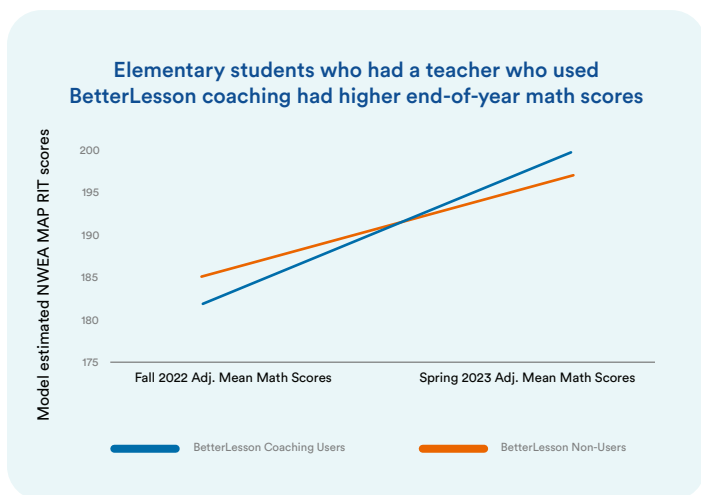
The results of this study are twofold: impact of BetterLesson HQPL on student achievement in reading and mathematics and on teacher motivation and self-efficacy. Here, we will break down the results of both components of the study.

Student Achievement

To understand the impact of BetterLesson high-quality professional learning on student achievement, researchers used regression analysis to compare students' outcomes in reading and mathematics between elementary students whose teachers participated in BetterLesson HQPL vs. those whose teachers did not. **The study found that elementary students whose teachers participated in BetterLesson HQPL had higher end-of-year NWEA scores in both reading and mathematics.** These results are also broken down by teachers who used BetterLesson coaching and teachers who participated in BetterLesson workshops.

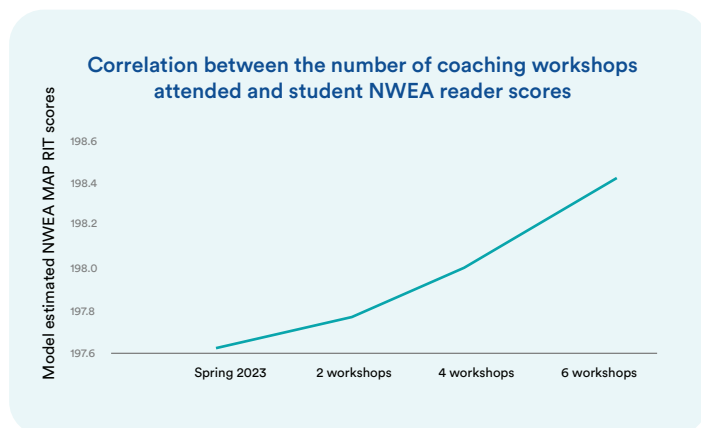
Coaching

Students whose teachers participated in BetterLesson coaching had higher end-of-year NWEA math and reading scores compared to those whose teachers did not participate. Though the differences are relatively minor, it's important to note that this study was conducted in a single school year. It could be hypothesized that with ongoing coaching, teachers would continue to improve their practice, and in turn, students would continue to demonstrate growth.



Workshops

The study also found that having a teacher who participated in BetterLesson workshops was connected to significantly higher NWEA reader scores. In fact, the more workshops in which a students' teacher participated, the higher the students' reading scores. This finding underpins the importance of ongoing learning opportunities for teachers. Through sustained high-quality professional learning, teachers are able to deepen student learning.



Teachers' Perception of Value and Self-Efficacy

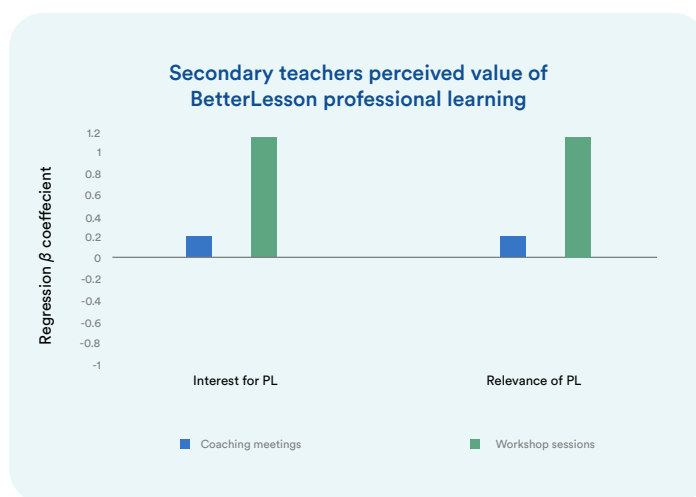
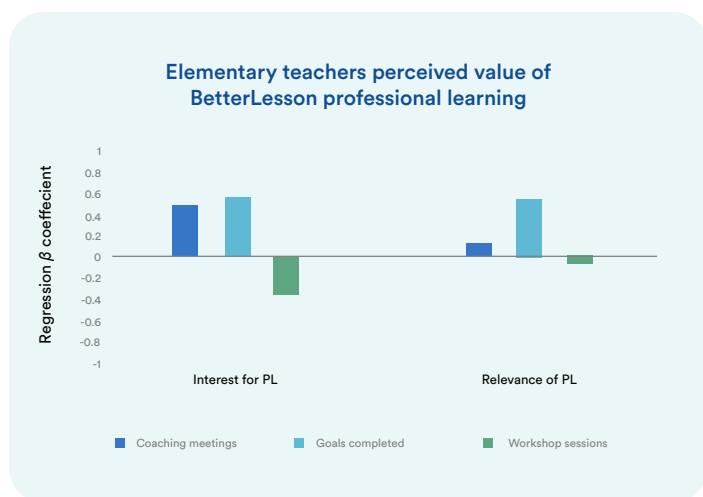


Researchers also sought to understand the impact of BetterLesson HQPL on teachers' motivation and self-efficacy. Their findings are divided into two categories: impact of BetterLesson HQPL on teachers' perceived value of PL (defined as interest in and relevance of PL) and on teachers' motivation (defined as self-efficacy for elementary teachers and mastery-approach goals for secondary teachers)

Teachers' Perceived Value of Professional Learning

For elementary teachers, more coaching meetings and professional goals completed was associated with an increase in the perceived value of PL. This finding is critical to understanding the role of personalized professional support systems. Through one-on-one support, like coaching and individualized goals, teachers are able to see more tangibly the value of professional learning.

For secondary teachers, more coaching meetings and workshop sessions was associated with an increase in the perceived value of PL. Interestingly, for secondary teachers, workshops were more strongly associated with higher values of professional learning. This finding tells an important story: *different teachers have different professional needs*. Though all teachers can benefit from professional workshops, as evidenced by the aforementioned data on student performance, it's important to know that workshops might fill a unique need for more collaborative, cross-disciplinary and cross-grade-level learning experience for secondary teachers. Understanding this can help inform planning a responsive professional learning program.



Teachers' Motivation

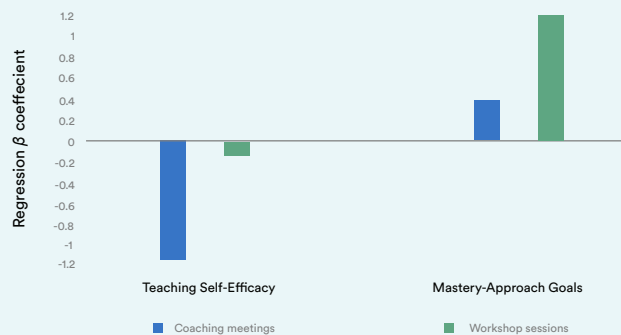
For elementary teachers, more coaching meetings, professional goals completed, and workshops were associated with an increase in their self-efficacy beliefs. This finding reveals the critical role that effective PL programs can have on fostering teacher motivation and self-confidence, a critical component to teacher retention and success.

For secondary teachers, more coaching meetings and workshops were associated with increased mastery-approach goals. Because teachers meeting their instructional goals is a critical component of student success, it is important to understand how best to support teachers in meeting their goals. This finding reveals the measurable impact that coaching and workshops can have on secondary teachers' abilities to grow toward their goals.

The correlation between BetterLesson professional learning and elementary teacher motivation



The correlation between BetterLesson professional learning and secondary teacher motivation



A Note on Findings

As the graphs suggest, there was a negative relationship found between elementary teachers' experiences with professional learning and their mastery-approach goals. Per the researchers' hypothesizing, this could likely be a function of the role of an elementary school teacher. That is, because elementary educators teach all subjects, mastery-approach goals can be more difficult to evaluate; conversely, because elementary educators work with the same group of students all day, rather than seeing rotating groups of students like secondary educators, it is easier for those educators to identify their sense of self-efficacy.

For the secondary teachers, the reality of multiple classes and groups of students may make it harder to feel consistently effective. But since secondary teachers typically focus on one topic, and their students have had many years of practice learning and testing, it may be easier for them to feel and see that mastery play out. A multi-year study would also give us more information about these findings.

Conclusion and Future Considerations

The results of this study, which satisfy the ESSA evidence requirements for Level III, reveal the positive effect of BetterLesson high-quality professional learning on both student achievement and teachers' motivational beliefs. As districts look to develop and potentially outsource professional learning programs, this study offers empirical assurance of the impact of BetterLesson's ["impact-ready"](#)⁵ HQPL offerings.

Even more, the results demonstrate the need for districts to create PL plans that are responsive to teachers' needs as distinguished by characteristics like grade-level. The differential effects of PL programs for elementary vs secondary teachers underscores their different needs. In other words, there is not a one-size-fits-all model of professional learning; instead, PL programs must be personalized to meet the unique needs of each district's teachers and students. Through an individualized combination of [one-on-one coaching](#)⁶ and [workshops](#)⁷, districts can demonstrably improve student outcomes and teacher motivation and self-efficacy.



Read the full study on our website:
betterlesson.com/evidence-and-research

References

1. [LearnPlatform by Instructure](#)
2. [Regional Educational Laboratory At American Institutes for Research](#), “ESSA Tiers of Evidence What You Need to Know”
3. [RAND](#), “How Do Teachers Spend Professional Learning Time, and Does It Connect to Classroom Practice?”
4. [Learning Policy Institute](#), “Restarting and Reinventing School Learning in the Time of COVID and Beyond”
5. [BetterLesson’s ESSA Level III Credentials](#)
6. [BetterLesson 1:1 Job-Embedded Coaching for Educators](#)
7. [BetterLesson Workshops to Build Student-Centered Classrooms](#)
8. [BetterLesson and LearnPlatform](#), “Evaluating the Efficacy of BetterLesson: Connecting Professional Learning with Teacher and Student Outcomes”



[Schedule a call](#) with us today to learn more about how we can partner with your school or district to provide individualized high-quality professional learning for your educators.



BetterLesson provides 1:1 virtual coaching and small group high-quality professional learning focused on supporting educators to create classrooms where students drive their own learning, exercise choice and ownership, and develop the personal agency they need to succeed. We provide job-embedded support across a wide range of topics including instructional leadership, student engagement, responsive and inclusive practices, innovative models & remote learning, and curriculum and academic content.

We have partnered with more than 30,000 educators across 47 states plus D.C., Puerto Rico and 5 countries internationally. BetterLesson’s free Lab site with a continuously growing library of evidence-based strategies, has a total of almost 2 million users with an average monthly user total of more than 500,000. BetterLesson values the pursuit of educational equity and is dedicated to ensuring every student—regardless of race, income, national origin, gender identity, ability, or location —has access to an excellent education.

For more information, visit betterlesson.com

