



Learning in Liberia: Literacy and Numeracy Gains in Year 1

A Study on Bridge Partnership Schools for Liberia (PSL)

Executive Summary



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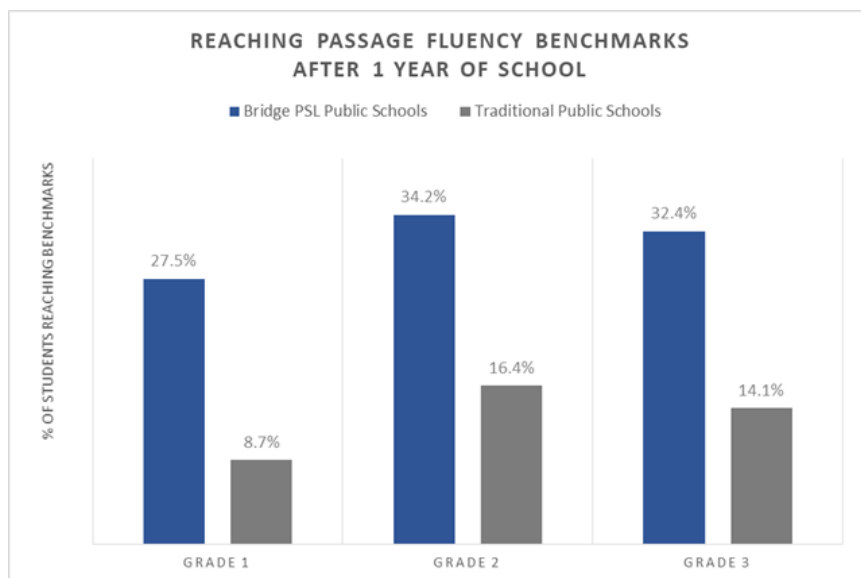
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Bridge International Academies opened 25 PSL public schools in eight different counties across Liberia in September 2016. To better understand how Bridge PSL public schools can drive educational gains, the Ministry of Education, Pencils of Promise, Worldreader, University of Liberia, and Bridge embarked upon “The Bridge PSL Public School Study.” This study compares performance for students attending Bridge PSL public schools with those in comparable traditional public schools.

Over the school year, we observed clear performance differences. Bridge PSL public school students in the early grades show demonstrably superior reading and math skills compared to their counterparts in traditional public schools. Bridge PSL public school students read faster and with greater accuracy. Bridge PSL public school students also solve basic math problems faster. The learning gains made at Bridge PSL public schools in a single academic year are equivalent to almost 3 years of English instruction and nearly 2 years of math instruction at traditional public schools. An independent impact study of the PSL program, led by the Center for Global Development and Innovations for Poverty Action, confirms the large learning gains driven by Bridge PSL.

Non-readers were transformed into emergent readers. At Bridge PSL public schools, almost 80% of non-readers made this transition compared to less than 50% for traditional public schools.

The number of proficient early grade readers doubled; more than twice the number of Bridge PSL public school students met reading fluency benchmarks compared to traditional public school students. In fact, the average Bridge PSL 1st grader will begin 2nd grade reading more than twice as fast as last year’s incoming 3rd graders.



It will be some time before we will know the full impact of Bridge support of public school education in Liberia, but these initial findings suggest that students in Bridge PSL public schools are learning better and faster than their peers. If this trend continues, it will mean that Bridge PSL public school students will be much better equipped to face the increasing demands of secondary school and college than their traditional public school peers.

The full report provides all relevant technical details, but a brief overview of the study and its measures will be helpful. The study measured performance with standard, widely used reading and math tests, suitable for assessing progress in the earliest years of formal education. The analysis focuses on student learning growth and compares the gains made by students in Bridge PSL and traditional public schools. Bridge PSL public schools in this study were randomly selected from those six counties in Liberia hosting both Bridge PSL and traditional public schools. Comparison schools were selected based on similarity and proximity to the Bridge PSL public schools. Students at all schools were randomly chosen to participate.

It is important to note that the goal of this study is to provide some indication of the relative benefits that accrue to Bridge PSL public school students. This study favors rapid response, which provides Bridge with information to drive improvements, and is not meant to definitively determine the impact of Bridge PSL public schooling. The trade-offs that impair precision and certainty, such as its small sample size, the use of a nonrandom comparison group of schools, and a sizable student attrition rate, are also the features of this study that reduce time and cost and make it possible to produce a rapid, if incomplete, performance comparison.

Despite these limitations, we are encouraged by this early positive signal of impact on learning outcomes, particularly as significant learning gains have also been found by the independent randomized evaluation. The Ministry of Education and Bridge PSL public schools look forward to continuing this partnership in working to improve learning and the opportunity that brings for the students of Liberia.