

How School University Partnerships Can Improve Equitable Learning Opportunities for Underserved Children

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INTRODUCTION

- Many schools serving predominantly low-income and/or minority students face barriers to providing students equitable learning opportunities, resulting in poor student outcomes
- School-university partnerships are an opportunity to ameliorate learning opportunities for underserved students (Griffiths et al., 2022)
- This study examines the implementation and effectiveness of the Literacy Fellows Program (LFP), a partnership between the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC), and Baltimore City Schools, which assigned college undergraduate students (volunteers) to the first- and second-grade classrooms of two local elementary schools for course credit

Key Questions:

- (1) How is the Literacy Fellows Program supporting your teaching in the classroom this semester? (Teacher Specific)
- (2) What benefits, if any, does the LFP bring to the first- and second-grade students this semester?
- (3) How have you benefitted from the LFP?
- (4) What are the things that work the best about the program? What are the things that work the least?

METHOD

Participants:

- 14 first- and second-grade teachers serving urban students at two public schools located within the Baltimore-Washington corridor
- 26 college undergraduate student volunteers (LFV)

Note: Several teachers and volunteers were interviewed more than once, during each wave of data collection

Table 1. Students' Characteristics and Outcomes. School Year 2018-2019 (in percentages unless otherwise specified)

	School A	School B
Size (Number of Students)	317	222
Racial/Ethnic Composition		
African American	44	68
Latinx	19	26
White	32	5
Other	5	1
Students Eligible for Free and Reduce-Price Meals (FARM)	61	67
Student Outcomes		
Proficient in English Language Arts	5	6.6

METHOD (CONTINUED)

Measures:

- A multiple case study was conducted over the course of three years
- Semi-structured interviews were conducted and recorded, probing the teachers and volunteers experience with the Literacy Fellows Program (LFP)
- Responses were coded according to how the LFV was used, the perceived benefits of the first- and second-grade students, teachers, and volunteers, as well as the perceived challenges

RESULTS

Figure 1. How the LFP Supported the Teacher in the Classroom

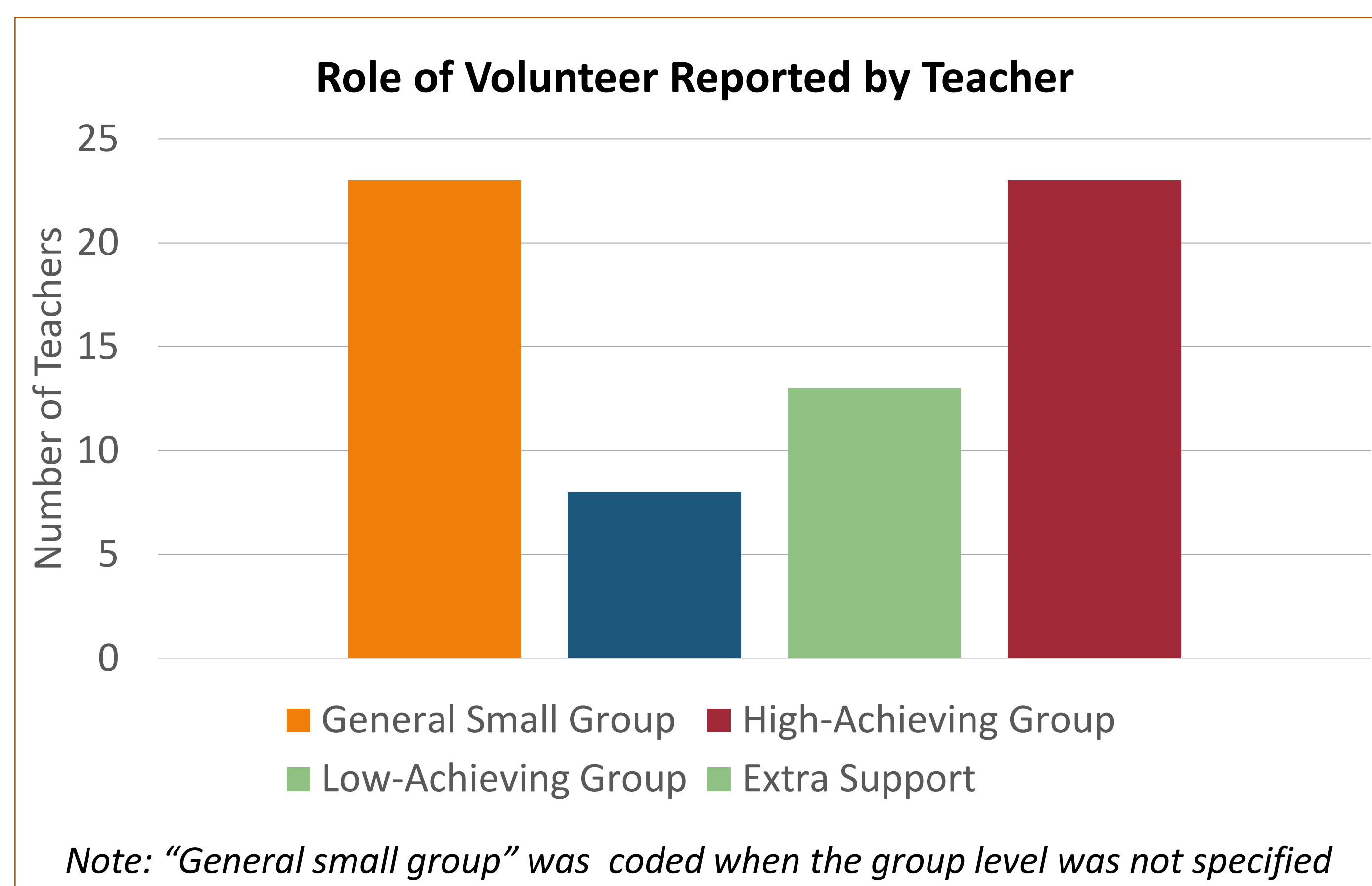
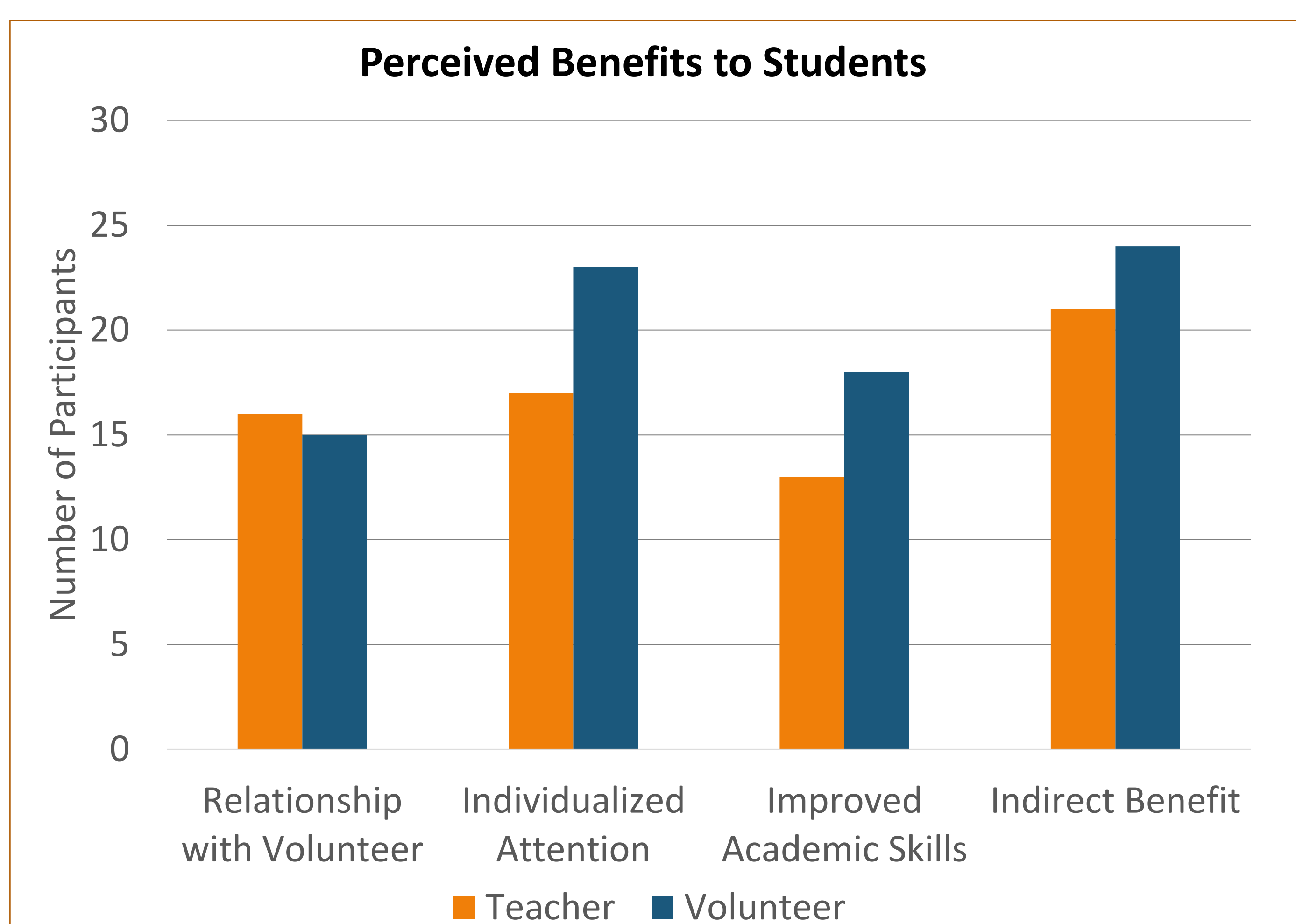


Figure 3. How the LFP Benefitted the First- and Second-Grade Students



RESULTS (CONTINUED)

Table 2. How the LFP Benefitted Teachers and Volunteers

Program Strengths	Frequency
Teacher	
Allows for Greater Group Equity	23
Able to Provide More Targeted Group Instruction	8
Volunteer	
Meaningful Experience	10
Sense of Doing Something Good	13

Table 3. What Worked the Least Well About the LFP

Program Limitations	Frequency
Teacher	
Insufficient Time with Volunteers	8
Finding Time to Train/Plan with Volunteer	12
Volunteer	
Insufficient Time with Students	12
Need Additional Training	20

CONCLUSION

- Many students in large urban school systems are denied equitable learning opportunities (Anyon, 2014; Payne, 2008) resulting in poor academic outcomes
- All teachers recognized the Literacy Fellows Program as an opportunity to provide equitable time with each small group
- Participants reported perceived benefits for all parties involved: teacher, volunteer, and student
- However, many teachers and volunteers identified the frequency and duration of volunteer visits as a limitation, expressing the need for more training and more time with the students.
- The results of this study suggest that school-university partnerships have the potential to improve equitable learning opportunities for underserved children, even with limited time and training.
- Further research is needed to examine the impact of such programs using measurable student outcomes.

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