Evaluation of the Refugee Educator Foundations of Practice Pilot Project

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Carey Institute for Global Good commissioned RTI International to conduct an evaluation of their pilot of the *Refugee Educators Foundation of Practice* (REFP) online course, offered to 3 cohorts over 2.5 years in 3 states – Arizona, Washington, and New York. We surveyed over 300 course participants and compared pre- and post-course responses for those who took both surveys. We also interviewed all 9 course facilitators and 22 educators across the 3 cohorts and states. Here is a summary of what we found:

- **Despite the COVID pandemic, educators volunteered for this 9-month, online course plus coaching and a striking 43% completed it.** The numbers defy the dismal 5% - 15% average completion rate for free online courses, and at a time when educators were overwhelmed with "emergency teaching" in response to the pandemic.
- **The course had a significant impact on teaching practices, beliefs, and preparation to work with refugee students and their families, even for the most experienced educators working with refugee students.** Educators who completed the *REFP* course felt more prepared to work with refugee students, their families, and students whose primary language is not English after taking the course. Moreover, beliefs about refugee students and their families changed significantly from pre- to post-course, in favor of more positive, empathic, and asset-focused beliefs. The biggest changes in beliefs were about serving the whole child, beyond just their academic needs, and the importance of recognizing and valuing each child and what they bring to the classroom and their learning. Psychologists know that what we believe influences how we think and act. *REFP* focused on educators' beliefs about students and how those beliefs impact relationships and influence teaching practices. In this study, educators' beliefs were significantly and strongly correlated with their teaching practices. Educators reported significant changes in teaching practices designed to support refugee students, English Language Learners, and in many cases, all learners. Changes in teaching practices were strongly related to the supports they provided and the extent to which they felt prepared to work with refugee students, their families, and English Language Learners.
- **Participation in the course resulted in a significant, second-order effect of systems impact, with many participants taking action beyond their own classrooms.** The education of each child should be viewed as a collective responsibility, which includes supports at all levels of the system. Our study found that participants saw significant positive changes in supports for refugee education at the teacher, school, and district levels after taking the *REFP* course. Changes in these supports were significantly correlated with educators' preparedness to work with refugee students and their families. *REFP* supported teachers in designing and implementing projects that had an impact on school and/or district policies and practices focused on supporting refugee students and families. Projects ranged from creating new curricula, to professional development for colleagues, to changing how the district conducted new student and family intake with refugee and multilingual students and families.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Why a course for working with refugee students?

In this report, we focus on outcomes of the Center for Learning in Practice *Refugee Educator Foundations of Practice (REFP)* pilot project. *REFP* is a modularized online course, embedded in a broader community of practice called the Refugee Educator Academy. *REFP* is designed to support educators' work with refugee students and families across the United States.

At a time when there are more than 80 million displaced people worldwide and issues of marginalization and inequity are amplified, *Refugee Educator Foundations of Practice* (*REFP*) focuses on the educators who work with some of the most vulnerable children in our education systems, to change policy, pedagogy, and practice.
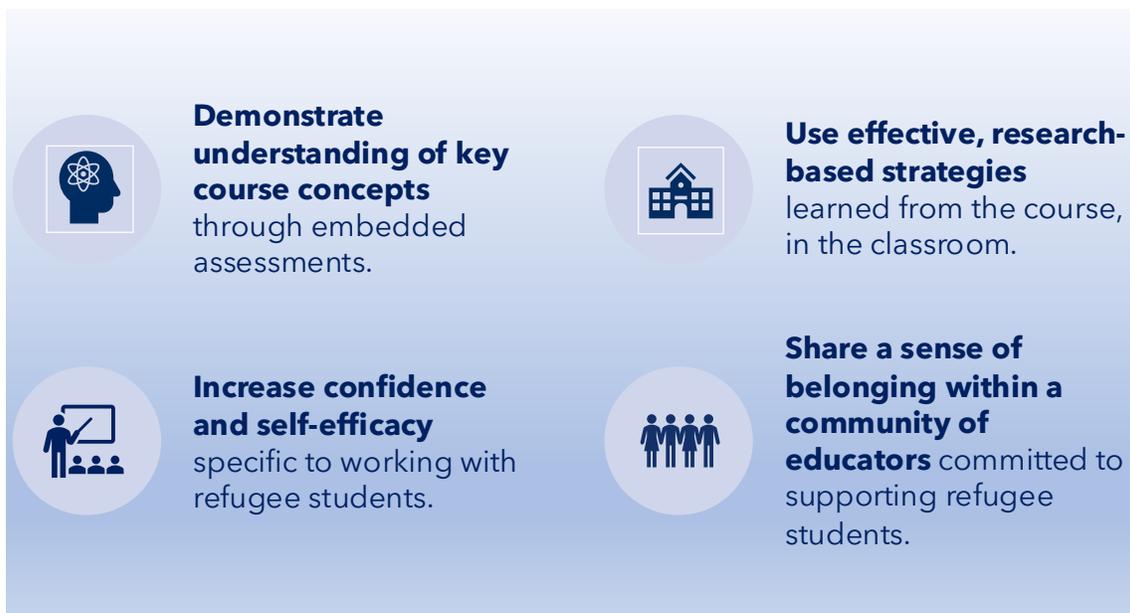
The course is built around a [Sustainable Learning Framework](#) to enhance educators' professional learning. The framework highlights educational practices that contribute to a healthy learning ecosystem. These include the co-creation of knowledge, shared as a community, in which educators and systems are self-reflective and adaptive to rapidly changing environments. Learning is an iterative, evidence-based process that addresses immediate needs and supports transformative insights and actions. This framework supports *REFP* in addressing 4 overarching goals:

Quality education is the anchor

First and foremost, school should be a safe haven. Schools also play an important role in identifying refugee children at risk…and they can help connect them with appropriate services. Quality education is the anchor that will keep children in the classroom…education has a protective effect only if it is of good quality.

– The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Education Report, 2016

Figure 1. *REFP* 4 overarching goals

Demonstrate understanding of key course concepts through embedded assessments.

Use effective, research-based strategies learned from the course, in the classroom.

Increase confidence and self-efficacy specific to working with refugee students.

Share a sense of belonging within a community of educators committed to supporting refugee students.

REFP was designed as a pilot project to be implemented over 2 ½ years across three states—Washington, Arizona, and New York—and across three consecutive cohorts, in which the course would be iteratively improved based on participant feedback (see **Table 1**). Education policy, funding, and the political landscape varies widely across these three states, providing an opportunity to test curricula and instructional methods that could apply across a wider variety of contexts. The timeline for the three cohorts is shown in the **Table 1**.

Table 1. Timeline for the 3 cohorts and iterative refinements to the course

COHORT	DATES	CHANGES MADE DUE TO COHORT FEEDBACK
1	July – October 2019, with coaching from November 2019 – April 2020	Improved navigation and access to course content and discussion forums; added more early elementary examples and resources.
2	January – May 2020, with coaching June – November 2020	Reduced content and added more focused discussion and assignments; added more resources relevant to online teaching and learning.
3	June – October 2020 with coaching from November 2020 through April 2021	Reorganized course pages and modules, simplified navigation, reduced content, and allowed for stand-alone short modules.

Course structure and participation

REFP was designed as a 12-week facilitated, online course, followed by 6 months of coaching to support implementation, dialog, and reflection for deeper learning within a community of

practice. The course includes videos, forum spaces, reflective writing prompts, infographics, articles, and links to lesson plans and other curriculum resources. Each iteration or cohort of the pilot project was facilitated by three mentors, each a refugee educator in the 3 target states. Facilitation included asynchronous forums and biweekly Zoom Meet Ups as well as one-on-one support. Each module had embedded assessments for participants to monitor their learning, and if interested, they could earn micro-credentials in recognition of their learning. The screenshot to the right shows the landing page for the course and highlights the six modules, for which there is an aligned set of [micro-credentials](). [1]
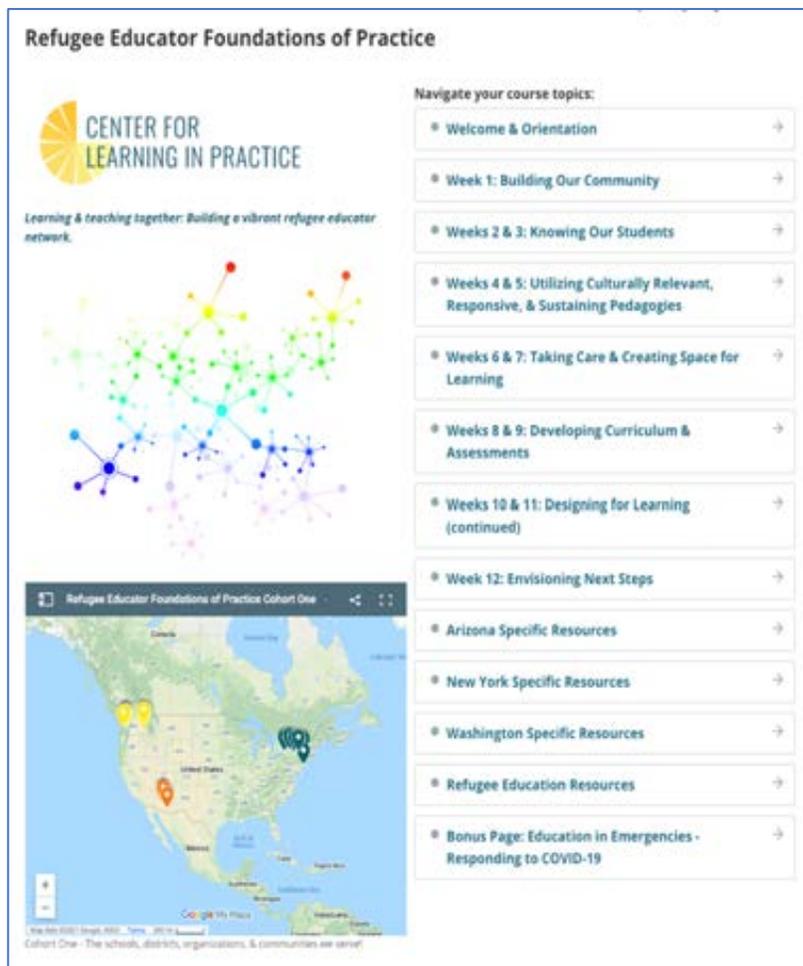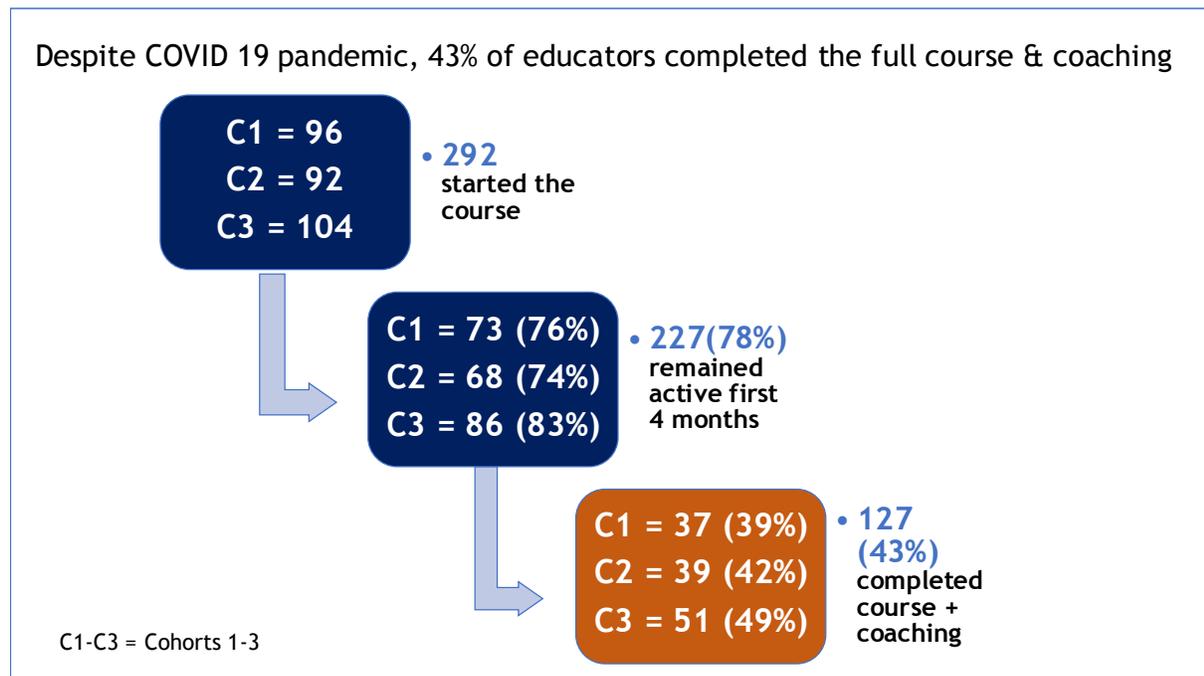

Enrollment in the course was limited to about 35 participants per state, although it increased for Cohort 3. **Figure 2** below shows course participation rates over time. Although 369 educators initially enrolled in the free course, 292 started it (i.e., created an account and/or started the first module). Of those 292, a surprising **43%** completed the course. The proportion of completers is significant for several reasons. First, all 3 cohorts were impacted by the COVID 19 pandemic, particularly Cohorts 2 and 3. Yet despite the stressors associated with the immediate shift to remote education and "emergency teaching," almost half of the educators persisted in an online course for which they volunteered. In fact, course completion rates *increased* across the 3 cohorts, despite the impact of the pandemic. Second, *REFP's completion rate is much higher—by about 3 to 8 times—than the average 5% to 15%* cited by industry and instructional designers for free online courses (Ahearn, 2019). This course completion rate reflects its value to the

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[1] The micro-credentials for this course are available through Digital Promise and found under *Carey Institute for Global Good*.

educators who volunteered their free time to complete the modules and participate in coaching, over a period of 9 months, including during their school year when most were actively engaged in teaching students, educators, or both.

Figure 2. Course completion by cohort

Despite COVID 19 pandemic, 43% of educators completed the full course & coaching

C1 = 96
C2 = 92
C3 = 104

• 292 started the course

C1 = 73 (76%)
C2 = 68 (74%)
C3 = 86 (83%)

• 227(78%) remained active first 4 months

C1 = 37 (39%)
C2 = 39 (42%)
C3 = 51 (49%)

• 127 (43%) completed course + coaching

C1-C3 = Cohorts 1-3

Evaluation of the pilot REFP course

The evaluation of the *REFP* pilot project involved two main sources of data: pre- and post-course surveys embedded into the course platform, and interviews with all 9 facilitators (3 per state across 3 cohorts) and 22 educators across the 3 cohorts. As data were collected and analyzed for each cohort, the Center for Learning in Practice used that information for course improvements for the next cohort, as described in Table 1 on page 4.

Study Design and Participants

The evaluation used a within-subjects, mixed methods design. The within-subjects design involved comparing participants' responses prior to starting and after completing the course modules to evaluate changes in teaching practices, beliefs, organizational supports, and sense of efficacy in working with refugee students and families. We gathered a mix of quantitative and qualitative data (hence "mixed methods") from the survey and interviews, to gather multiple perspectives and sources of evidence. **Table 2** shows the proportion of course enrollees who completed the pre-course survey, and of those, the proportion who also completed the post-course survey, as well as interviewee counts.

Table 2. Participants who provided data for the evaluation

Cohort	Pre-course survey (% of enrollees per cohort)	Pre- and Post-course survey (% of pre-course survey takers)	Interviews
1	105 (92%)	59 (56%)	3 facilitators 4 educators
2	107 (92%)	48 (45%)	3 facilitators 9 educators
3	109 (78%)	61 (56%)	3 facilitators 9 educators
Total	321 of 369 enrollees (87%)	168 of 321 (52%)	9 facilitators 22 educators

Note: A higher proportion of educators completed the pre-course survey than started the course. The pre-course survey link was sent via an introductory email. Twenty-nine individuals completed the pre-course survey without starting the course.
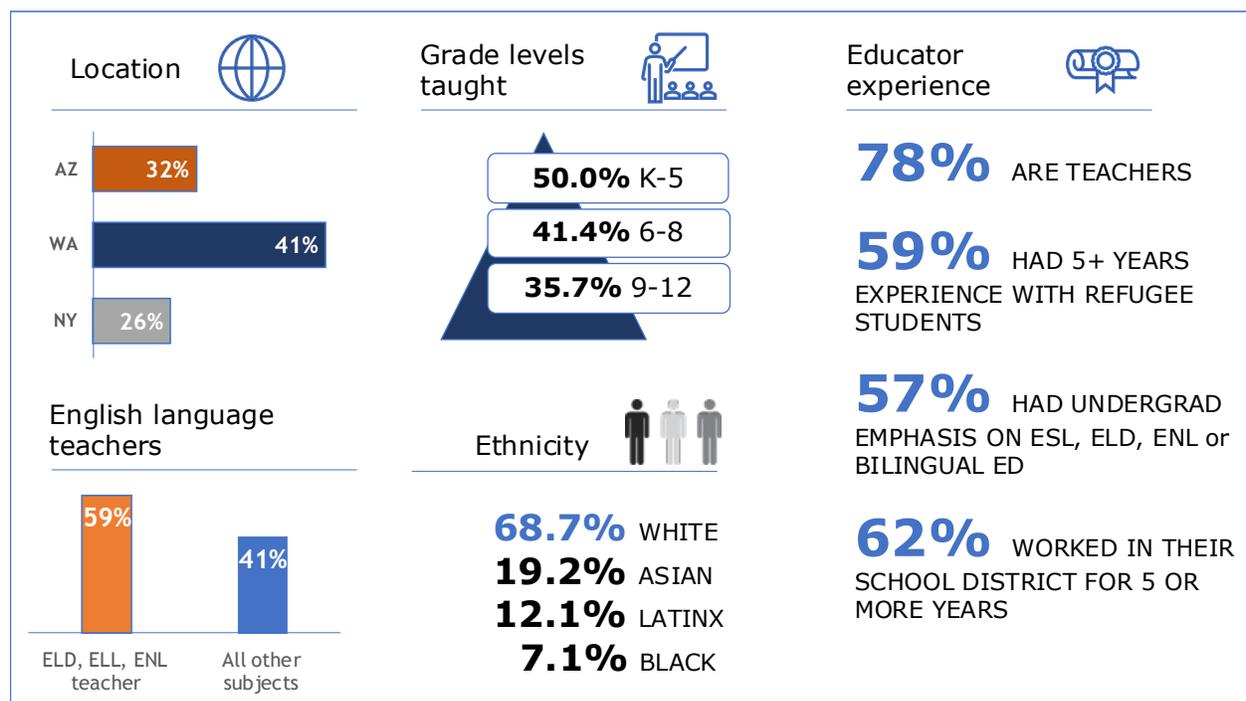
To conduct the within-subjects study, we used data only from those who completed both the pre- and post-course surveys.[2] Because participation dropped over the course, so did the number of survey completers from pre- to post-course. Additionally, some survey items changed over the 3 cohorts as we identified poorly functioning survey items. As a result, for

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[2] The pre- and post-course comparisons were done in two ways: 1) educators responded to the same items in the pre- and the post-course surveys and we compared their responses; and 2) in the post-course survey only, educators rated how they stood on a given item BEFORE they started the course and AFTER the course. The latter approach was used so educators could make an informed decision about their status prior to the course on a given outcome after they understood that outcome better due to taking the course. For items that used both approaches, we compared responses on the pre-course survey to responses to the "BEFORE" version of the same item in the post-course survey. Interestingly, their responses were correlated, but only moderately (i.e., correlations ranged from about 0.30 – 0.50), suggesting that their perception on the outcome changed, possibly due to participating in the course.

most pre/post course comparisons, we used data from Cohorts 2 and 3 only, because they received the same version of the post-course survey.[3]

Figure 3 describes the Cohort 2 and 3 participants whose data we used to conduct most of the pre/post course analyses. Note that 78% of the participants were classroom teachers: 22% held other roles, e.g., instructional coaches, district staff, school counselors, and so on. Additionally, they were relatively experienced, with most having at least 5 years or more of experience in their district and in working with refugee students.

Figure 3. Pre/Post Survey Respondent Characteristics from Cohorts 2 and 3

Location

AZ 32%
WA 41%
NY 26%

Grade levels taught

50.0% K-5
41.4% 6-8
35.7% 9-12

Educator experience

78% ARE TEACHERS

59% HAD 5+ YEARS EXPERIENCE WITH REFUGEE STUDENTS

57% HAD UNDERGRAD EMPHASIS ON ESL, ELD, ENL or BILINGUAL ED

English language teachers

59% ELD, ELL, ENL teacher
41% All other subjects

Ethnicity

68.7% WHITE
19.2% ASIAN
12.1% LATINX
7.1% BLACK

62% WORKED IN THEIR SCHOOL DISTRICT FOR 5 OR MORE YEARS

To assess whether those with both pre- and post-course data in all 3 cohorts were different from those with only pre-course data, we compared them on the characteristics shown in **Figure 3** (e.g., state, years working in their district and with refugee students, etc.). None of the comparisons were statistically significant, suggesting that the sample who completed both surveys was not likely different from the rest of the course participants, in ways that might have an observable impact on the results.[4]

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[3] The survey items changed after Cohort 1 data were analyzed, due to poor item performance. However, we did retain several outcomes measures across all 3 cohorts, and in this report will indicate the analyses involving those outcomes. Otherwise, pre- and post-course comparisons were conducted using Cohorts 2 and 3 data only.
[4] We used ANOVA models to compare the means between these groups for quantitative data and for variables that were categorical, e.g., location, we used Chi Square and Cramer's V. We acknowledge that there may be unmeasured variables that could differentiate those who completed both surveys from those who did not.

For the interviews, the sample was chosen to represent various grade bands, content areas, roles (teacher, department lead, district staff, etc.), and course completion status. For the latter, interviews with those who did not complete the course could provide insights as to why and how *REFP* might be structured to reduce the likelihood of dropping the course. Fewer educators were interviewed for Cohort 1 due to the onset of the COVID 19 pandemic and its impact on schooling. The educator interview sample characteristics are shown in the following table, with counts.

Cohort	Role	Grade levels	Course Completion status
1	Teacher – 2 Academic Coach – 1 Department Lead - 1	All – 1 Middle School – 1 Elementary - 1	Completed - 4
2	Teacher - 4 Coordinator-3 Specialist – 1 Counselor - 1	Elementary - 4 Middle School - 5 High School – 5 N/A - 2	Completed - 6 Incomplete - 3
3	Teacher - 6 ELD teacher/Department Chair - 1 Manager of non-profit - 1 District Staff - 1	Elementary - 3 Middle School - 1 High School – 3 N/A - 2	Completed - 6 Incomplete - 3

Note: Interviews with Cohort 1 included 4 educators, while Cohorts 2 and 3 included 9 each.

Evaluation findings

For the survey data, analyses focused on measuring change in key course outcomes before and after taking the REFP course. The variables we included in our analyses are listed below.

OUTCOME VARIABLES
▪ Preparation to teach/work with refugee students, families, and English Language Learners
▪ Use of teaching practices (e.g., scaffolding, universal design)
▪ Organizational/district/school and teacher supports for refugee students and their families
▪ Attitudes/beliefs about refugee students, families

PREDICTORS OF OUTCOMES

- Years of experience working with refugee students and families, years in one's current role, and year's working in one's district

- ELD/ENL* role vs. all other roles

- Hours spent on the course

- State the participant lived in (WA, AZ, or NY)

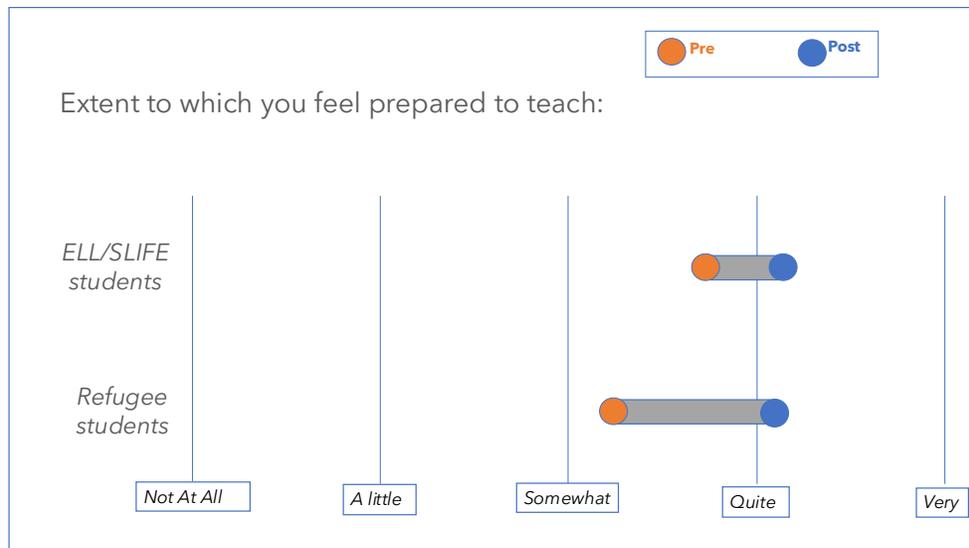- Pre-course status on the outcome of interest and other outcome variables that may be related

*ELD/ENL = English Language Development/English as a New Language

From our open-ended survey questions and interviews, we analyzed participants' responses for recurring themes, to supplement the quantitative information we collected in the survey. We share the results by each outcome on which the course was focused.

1. Educators are more prepared to support refugee students and English Language Learners after taking the course.

"I have been able to prepare my lesson plan more diligently by connecting the background knowledge of my students, and by learning how to prepare for those needing extra help." – Teacher, Cohort 2

Educators rated their preparation to work with refugee and ELL/SLIFE students on a 5-point scale, ranging from "Not at All" to "Very Much"[5], before and after taking the course, across all 3 cohorts. The average change in pre- to post-course preparedness shifted educators from feeling "somewhat" to "quite" prepared to support these students, as shown in the graph below. This shift is statistically significant.[6] For supporting English Language Learners and SLIFE[7] students, the average shift in preparedness was about a third of a scale point (0.36), whereas for refugee

Extent to which you feel prepared to teach:

● Pre   ● Post

ELL/SLIFE students

Refugee students

Not At All | A little | Somewhat | Quite | Very

students, the average shift was almost a full point (0.83). This latter shift reflects an effect-size of 0.95, *regarded in social science research as a large effect*.[8] To see a shift of this magnitude amongst this group is meaningful: these educators are relatively experienced already, prior to taking the course, with more than half having 5 or more years of experience working with refugee students and in their current roles in their district. It is notable that they feel more prepared to work with these students after taking this course.

When we evaluated the predictors of these two outcomes (shown in the graph above), we found the following as shown in **Table 3**, where a green check indicates a statistically significant predictor, and a red X indicates a non-significant predictor.[9] In summary, more hours spent on the course was associated with feeling more prepared to teach refugee and

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[5] These items were adapted from a survey developed by the Center for Research on the Context of Teaching at Stanford University, accessed at: https://crceducation.stanford.edu/system/files/ifl-austin2008.pdf

[6] We conducted dependent samples (also known as paired) t-tests to compare the differences in mean scale scores from pre- to post-course for each of these variables across all 3 cohorts. For preparation to teach ELL students, $t(125) = -5.05$, $p < 0.001$; for refugee students, $t(142) = -11.61$, $p < 0.001$.

[7] SLIFE = Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education.

[8] Here and for all other outcomes reported using effect sizes in this report, we used **Cohen's *d***, which is used to compare the size of the difference between two group means, i.e., pre- and post-course means for our purposes.

[9] We ran General Linear Models (GLMs) for each of the two outcomes (preparation to teach refugee students, and ELL/SLIFE students, post-course). Both models explained significant variability in each outcome: $R^2 = 0.65$ for the refugee student outcome, $R^2 = 0.56$ for the ELL/SLIFE student outcome; that is, the models explained 65% and 56% of the variability in these outcomes, respectively. Analyses included only Cohorts 2 and 3 (n = 99) as noted earlier in this report.

multilingual students, as was beliefs about teaching refugee students, and use of *REFP* targeted teaching practices.

Table 3. Statistically significant predictors of post-course preparedness

Predictor	Preparation to teach refugee students	Preparation to teach ELD, ENL, ELL
Pre-course level of preparedness	✔	✔
Years of experience with refugee students	✖	✖
Years in current role (more years)	✔	✖
Years in one's district	✖	✖
Hours spent on the course (more hours)	✔	✖
Beliefs about teaching refugee students, post-course (more positive beliefs)	✔	✔
Organizational supports, pre-course	✖	✖
Teaching practices, post-course (use of more of the REFP targeted teaching practices)	✔	✔
Educator's state	✖	✖
Teaching ELD/ENL/ELL vs. not	✖	✖

In the survey, participants also shared the most significant changes they made by participating in the course. The most frequently mentioned changes were in teaching practices, better appreciation of and empathy for refugee students and what they bring as learners, and making more effort to connect with refugee families, as shown in **Table 4**.

Table 4. Three most frequently cited areas of change due to participating in *REFP*

Area of change	Sample survey responses
1. Changes in teaching practices	• I am a lot more conscious about how I am differentiating for my ELL/Refugee students and try to be more intentional when scaffolding, even during online lessons. • A better understanding on the importance of providing an optimal learning environment for refugee students.
2. Better appreciation for and understanding of their refugee students	• [I've] grown in appreciation of the resilience refugee students have developed through the struggles they faced. • [I'm] considering the difference in refugee and immigrant students and the impacts they have on education
3. More reaching out, networking, and/or engaging with families of refugee students	• Increased family communications • Implement more outreach to families • Work harder at communicating with students' families and including them in their students' education

These findings are consistent with the analysis of quantitative data from the survey, as we describe next.

2. Educators changed attitudes and beliefs about working with refugee students.

"I have gained a deeper appreciation for the challenges and strengths my students bring with them. Overall, it has made me a better and stronger advocate for my students. I am reaching out more to my fellow teachers to ensure that students are set up for achieving success in all classes." – Teacher, Cohort 3

Psychologists know that what we believe influences how we think and act. *REFP* focused on educators' beliefs about students and how those beliefs impact relationships with students and influence teaching practices. Educators rated their agreement with belief statements on a 5-point scale (0 = "Not at all" to 4 =

Positive Beliefs about Teaching Refugee Students Increased

2.83   3.53

BEFORE REFP   AFTER REFP
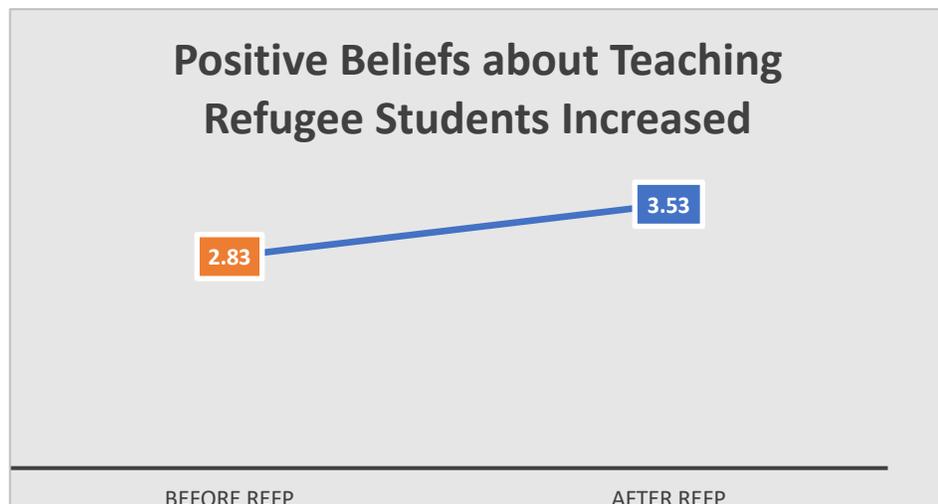
"A lot"), BEFORE and AFTER taking the course. We found that educator beliefs about refugee students and their families changed significantly after taking the course, on average about 0.7 points on the 5-point scale, in favor of more positive, asset-focused beliefs.[10] The statistical effect size of this change is 1.01, which is *considered large in the social sciences*. Given the level of experience with refugee students by most of these educators, the amount of change they report is unexpected, particularly when beliefs can be entrenched. Post-course beliefs were related to hours spent on the course, pre-course beliefs, teaching practices pre- and post-course, and preparedness to teach refugee students and ELL or SLIFE students pre- and post-course.

Figure 4 shows change in each of the beliefs we measured in the survey. Of the 6 belief statements, the largest shift was in willingness to share practices with other educators. This course was structured as a learning community, and these results suggest that this structure was effective. Interviews with a subset of participants indicated that this feature of the course was the most highly valued, particularly during the COVID pandemic when educators reported feeling more isolated due to the shift to remote teaching and learning.

Figure 4. Change from pre- to post-course in beliefs about teaching refugee students

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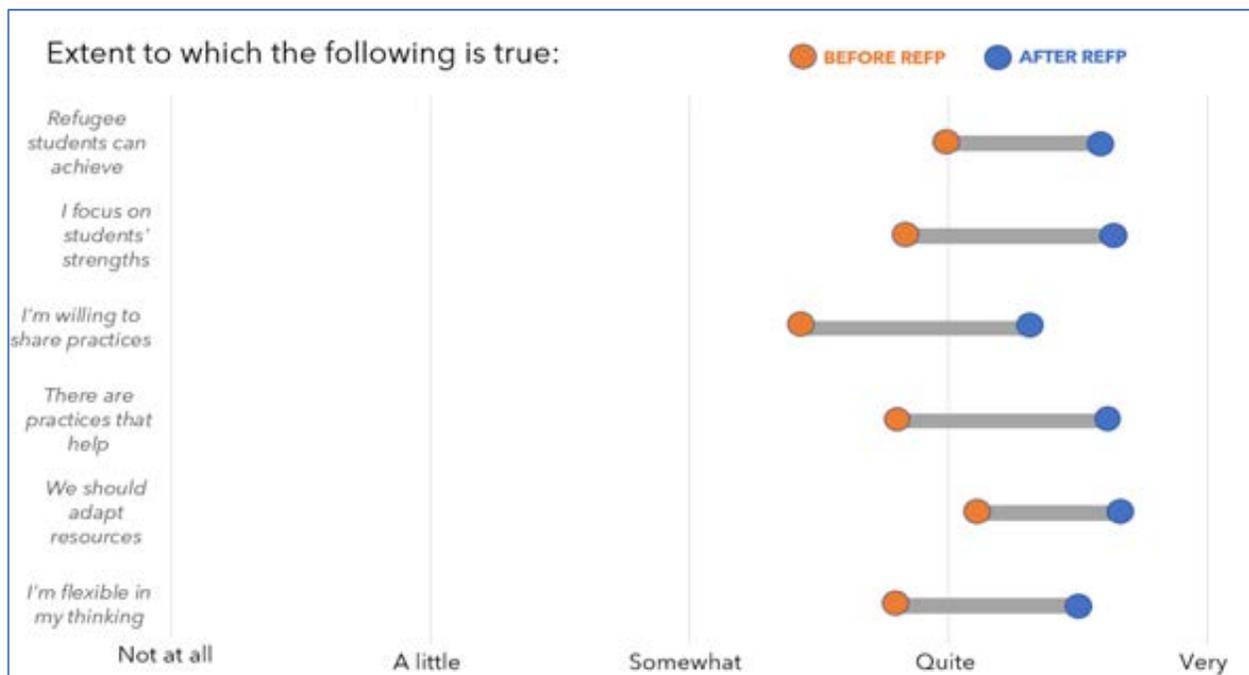
[10] We tested educators' responses to 6 belief statements (shown in Figure 4) before and after taking the course, using a dependent-samples t-test. We also combined the 6 belief items into a scale score and used the same statistical test. Each of the 6 t-tests were statistically significant, as well as the scale score t-test (t(94) -9.8, p<.001) indicating that educators reported more positive beliefs about teaching refugee students AFTER taking the course. The items measuring these beliefs were adapted from surveys accessed at Stanford University's Center for Research on the Context of teaching: https://crceducation.stanford.edu/survey-instruments. We evaluated the reliability of these items using a test of internal consistency – Cronbach's Alpha. Results indicate that these items show strong reliability, where Cronbach's Alpha = 0.86.

Open-ended survey responses and interviews indicated the biggest changes in educator beliefs were about serving the whole child, beyond just their academic needs, and growth in empathy for their refugee and multi-lingual students. Course content, particularly the videos, as well as shared discussions and reflections helped to facilitate the changes in beliefs. Sample quotes from interviews with educators include:

> "One thing I learned is that I have a lot of SIFE and SLIFE students and so I'm trying to recalibrate the way I think about their knowledge and life experiences that they have...Instead of thinking with such a deficit perspective, to try to see them as all the assets and knowledge they have from their lives, which are very, very different...to elevate them and their knowledge" – *Teacher, Cohort 1*

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> "I feel like I tend to be pretty open-minded and a patient, compassionate person and try to approach students from a non-judgmental space. And I think the course propelled me to the next level...I had no idea what this world was like for our ELL students and their families...there were pieces in the course, in videos and reading and talking to colleagues...this sense of the veil being lifted, and then over the course of the year, seeing the roadblocks and red tape I faced in my district, and knowing there's so much work to be done." – *Teacher and Department Chair, Cohort 3*

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> "I think I had a very fixed mindset and understanding: 'there's only one type of refugee...' [the course] definitely made me want to learn more and provide more time in my day for students to share, and open-ended questions when I meet with families...I'm less inclined to support students by answering or trying to finish their sentence when they struggle with their vocabulary–I really don't know what they're going to say..." – *Instructional Coach, Cohort 1*

3. Educators changed teaching practices and supports to refugee students and families.

"Something very basic that's changed is when we're looking at curriculum, I'm often thinking about what story isn't being told and where is the refugee experience showing up or not showing up? I'm trying to do a more focused job on making sure there's the mirrors to their stories in our curriculum." – Instructional Coach, Cohort 1

Decides of research indicate that teaching practices matter when it comes to student learning and achievement, and these practices should be aligned with students' learning needs. *REFP* focused on the use of specific teaching practices (e.g., scaffolding, universal design) to support the unique needs of refugee students, while also benefitting English language learners and other non-refugee students. In the post-course survey, educators rated

themselves on how often they used each of 7 instructional practices listed in **Figure 5** (below), BEFORE and AFTER they took the course.[11] Their ratings were on a sale of 0 (not at all) to 4 (very often). *REFP* participants significantly increased their

Use of Effective Teaching Practices Increased

3.25

2.4

BEFORE REFP   AFTER REFP
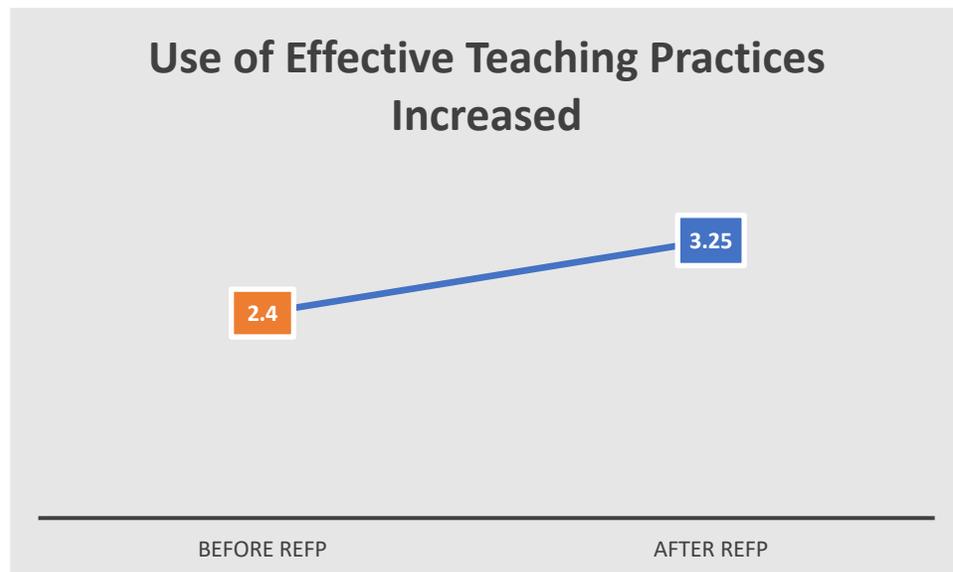
use of each of the targeted teaching practices, on average 0.85 points on the 5-point scale, as shown in the figure above. All before/after comparisons were statistically significant.[12] The statistical effect-size of the change was 1.20, which is *considered large in social science research.* This finding is meaningful because half the educators in this course had 5 or more years of experience working with refugee students and working in their districts. Moreover, the teachers were trying to apply these practices during the COVID pandemic, when they were under stress and teaching in vastly different conditions than most were accustomed to.

Post-course teaching practices were significantly correlated with their pre-and post-course beliefs about teaching refugee students. They also showed a significant correlation with the extent to which they felt prepared to teach refugee students post course. Those whose primary role was teaching ELD, ENL, or ELL reported greater changes than those who did not. **Figure 5** shows change in each of the 7 teaching practices measured in the survey. The largest shift was in sharing practices with other educators. Like their shifts in beliefs, this result may reflect the learning community structure of the course and underscores the importance of this feature of the Sustainable Learning Framework on which *REFP* was built.

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[11] As noted before, for some items we asked educators to rate themselves after completing the course, on outcomes BEFORE and AFTER the course. This method is useful for accessing perceptions of change on outcomes that participants understand more clearly after taking the course.

[12] We tested educators' responses to how often they used each of 7 practices (shown in Figure 5) before and after taking the course, using a dependent-samples or paired t-test. We combined the 7 practices into a scale score as well and used the same statistical test. Each of the 7 t-tests were statistically significant, as well as the scale score t-test, indicating that educators used each teaching practice more AFTER taking the course than before taking it.

Figure 5. Educators increased their use of all 7 instructional practices

Extent to which you use the following teaching practices…

Before REFP / After REFP

Differentiate lessons
Collaborate to improve
Share practice
Universal Design
Formative assessment
Scaffold instruction
Incorporate SEL

Not at all | A little | Somewhat | Quite a bit | A lot

In surveys and interviews, educators told us about the most significant changes they made to their practice, many of which were focused on instructional practices. The following examples are quotes from interviews and open-ended survey responses:

"It's made me build relationships with my students in a different way—oftentimes, differentiation meant holding some students to lower expectations. Whereas now all students are being held to high expectations. I feel like it [REFP] helped me realize that I was doing that." – *Teacher, Cohort 2*

"I'm a lot more conscious about how I am differentiating for my ELL/refugee students, and try to be more intentional when scaffolding, even during online lessons." – *Teacher, Cohort 2*

"Understanding social-emotional learning as foundational to academic discourse and learning more deeply…" – *Middle School Reading Intervention Specialist, Cohort 2*

Educator supports to refugee students and families also increased and those changes were statistically significant.[13] On average, educators reported a change of about 0.90 on the 5-point scale, measuring how often they provided specific supports to refugee families and students (from 0 = Not at All, to 4 = A lot). The effect size of this change is 1.02, which as noted before, is considered large in social science research. The largest change was in providing extra supports to refugee families to help their child succeed academically, as shown in **Figure 6** on the next page.

Teacher Supports to Refugee Students & Families Increased

2.62

1.71

BEFORE REFP   AFTER REFP
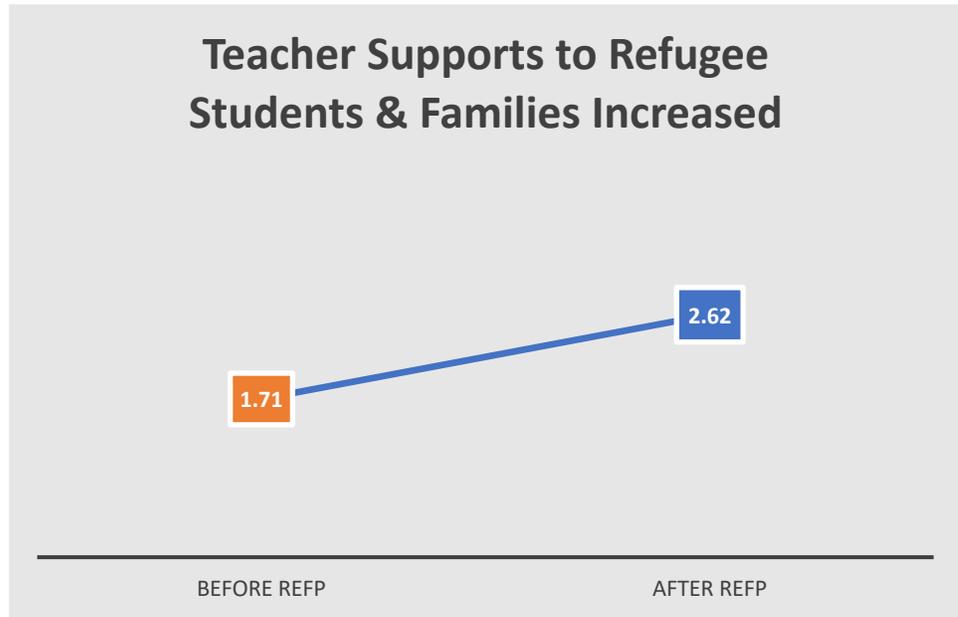
Teacher supports were significantly correlated with their beliefs about teaching refugee students; teaching practices; organizational supports, and the extent to which they felt prepared to work with refugee students and families. Through interviews and open-ended survey items, we learned that educators increased their work in engaging refugee families, advocating for them, and serving as a "bridge" between customs and practices in the United States and the countries from which refugee students were coming. Many reported functioning as a "social worker," by helping families find the resources they needed, both in- and outside of the education system. Some sample interview quotes include:

> "…I've been learning a lot about family engagement, and I've been creating with a Hispanic social worker here, a bilingual packet of community resources that the course certainly helped me with." – *Teacher, Cohort 1*
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>
> "Being a refugee educator means welcoming and assisting students and their families to learn how to navigate through the requirements of the local and

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[13] We tested educators' responses to how often they provided supports to refugee students and families (shown in Figure 6) before and after taking the course using a dependent-samples or paired t-test. We combined the 3 items into a scale score as well and used the same statistical test. Each of the 3 t-tests were statistically significant, as well as the scale score t-test, indicating that educators provided each type of support more AFTER taking the course than before taking it.

national educational process -academic, vocational and social emotional aspects from a global perspective. It also means being culturally competent in helping the family gain access to any necessary or desired resources and or services." *– Teacher, Cohort 2*

"…I gained a deeper appreciation for the challenges and strengths my students bring with them. Overall, it has made me a better and stronger advocate for my students. I am reaching out more to my fellow teachers to ensure that students are set up for achieving success in all classes." *-- Teacher, Cohort 3*

Figure 6. Educators increased their supports to refugee families and students
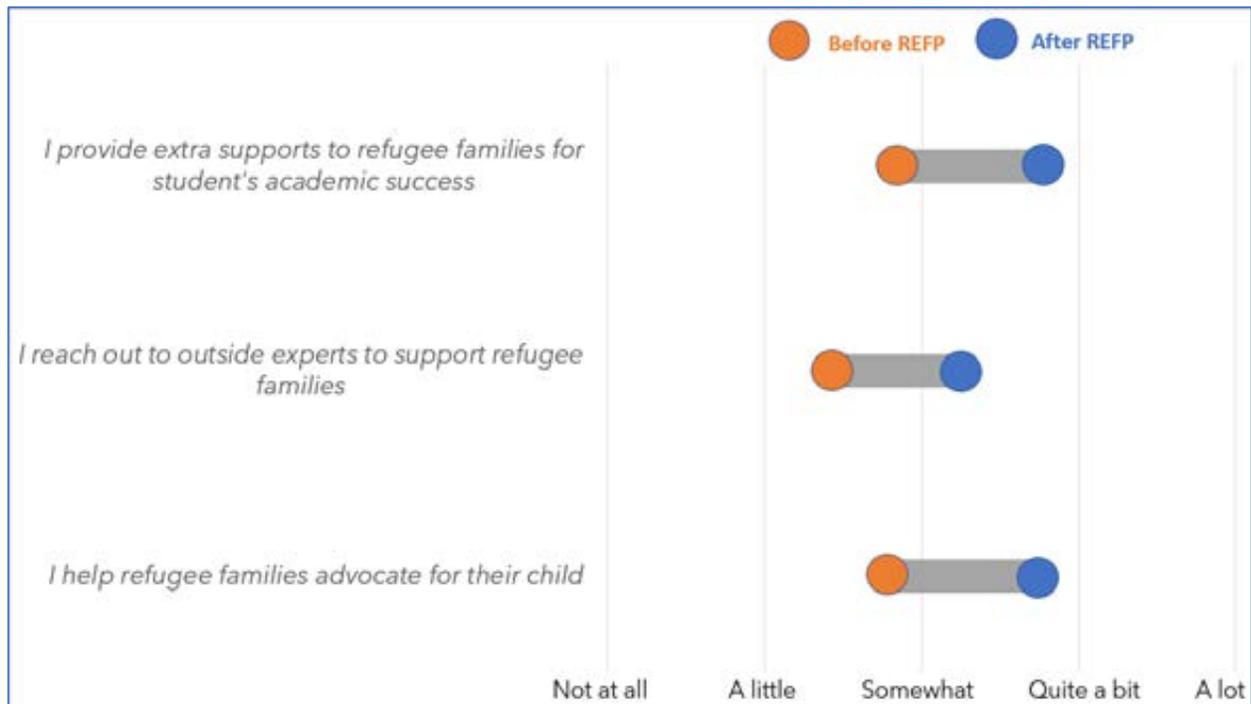
4. District and school level supports changed for refugee students and families.

"Our district has been developing a website. We created a "SEL" page that includes activities, lessons, books, and videos that I learned about in this course. I shared them with teachers in PD (professional development). They really like it. Many said 'this is what I need.'" – Instructional Coach, Cohort 3

The education of each child should be viewed as a collective responsibility, which includes supports at all levels of the system. We asked educators about the supports their organization, district, and/or school provided for refugee families and students. The supports we asked about included:

- Sharing views of refugee students and how to relate to them

- Seeking each other's advice about issues related to working with refugee students and families
- Working together to develop teaching materials or activities for refugee students

- Meeting to discuss common challenges in the classroom and with refugee students

- Sharing samples of work by refugee students

- Agreement on curriculum as it applies to refugee students

- Involving refugee families in setting goals and strategies for educational improvements

- Identification and use of local community resources to assist staff and refugee families

- Professional development on effective approaches to working with families of diverse cultural backgrounds

Overall, participants saw statistically significant positive changes in their organizational supports after taking the *REFP* course, with an average change of about 0.25 points on the 5-point scale, as shown in the graph below. The effect size of this change is 0.30, which is regarded as moderately small in the social sciences. Although statistically significant, and in the positive direction, these results do not match the magnitude of the other course results we shared. This is most likely because these organizational supports are not under the direct control of the course participants.

As we discuss shortly, a subset of participants completed a project for the course, some of which were focused on organization-level changes. The positive change in organizational supports reported by some of the course participants

Organizational supports for refugee students and families increased somewhat

1.76

2.0

BEFORE REFP   AFTER REFP
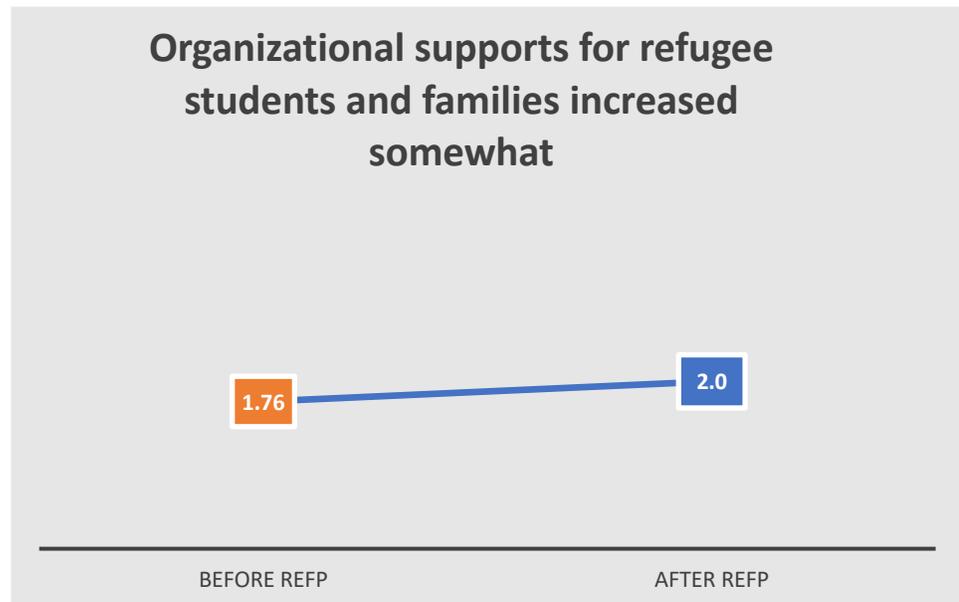
may be, in part, associated with these projects. Additionally, the course was designed to create a learning community, and the largest gains were in areas that reflected collaboration and supporting refugee families.

When viewed independently, statistically significant changes were seen in the organizational supports highlighted in **Figure 7** with a star:

Figure 7. Change in organizational supports for refugee students and families*
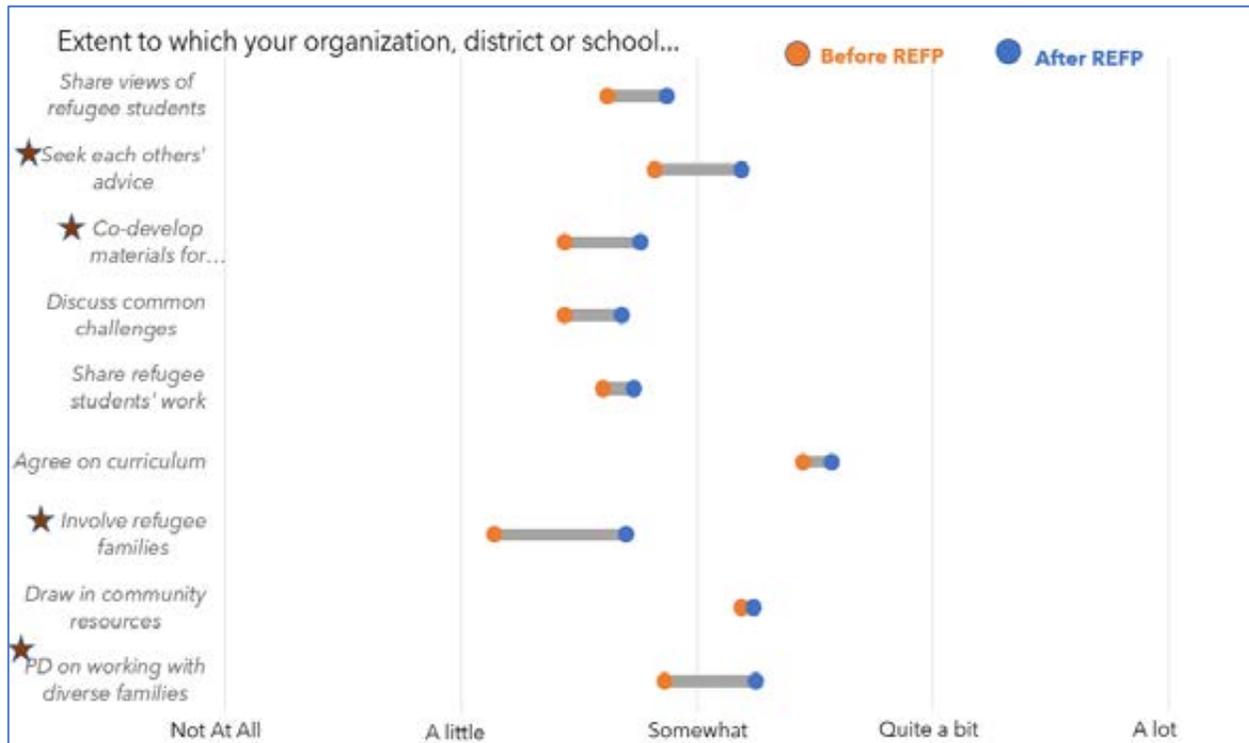
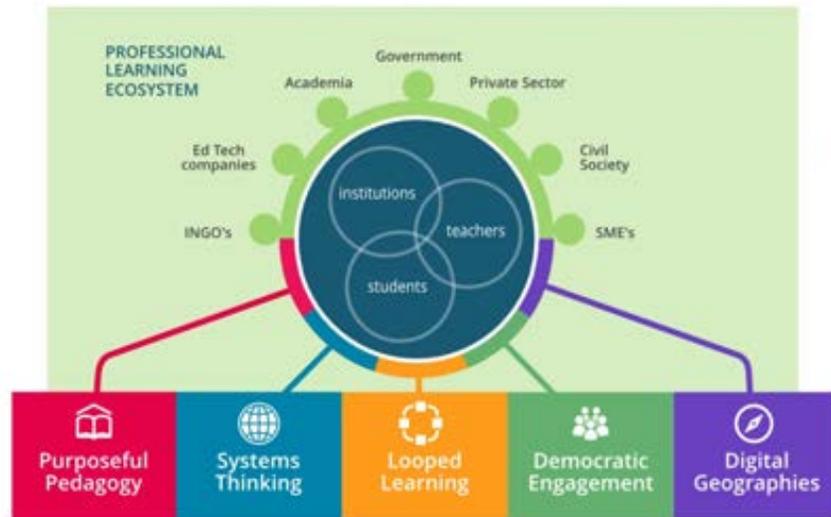*Those marked with a star showed statistically significant change from pre- to post-course.

Organizational supports were significantly correlated with educators' beliefs about teaching refugee students; educators' teaching practices; and teacher supports to refugee students and families. They were not significantly related to the extent to which educators felt prepared to work with refugee families or students.

5. Educators helped to institute practice and policy changes.

"There's so much of [the course] I've shared with my school district and my teachers. In fact, we're doing some virtual professional development our first two days back and one of the participants from the course is going to be using the project that she created during the course to teach the middle school teachers." – Facilitator, Cohort 2

Perhaps the most compelling finding in this study is that *REFP* supported teachers in designing and implementing projects that had an impact on not only their own professional practice, but also extended to school or district policies focused on supporting refugee students and families. All 3 cohorts had showcase events where educators shared their projects throughout the coaching phase of the course and in course MeetUp sessions. **Figure 8** shows how these projects align with each of the 5 disciplines of the Sustainable Learning Framework, as shown in the above graphic, on which *REFP* was developed.

5 disciplines of the Sustainable Learning Framework

Figure 8. Participants' course projects aligned with the Sustainable Learning Framework

| Purposeful Pedagogy	• Created and led PD for colleagues from what they learned in *REFP* • Integrated SEL into lessons to support refugee students • Modified lessons with *REFP* practices and shared with colleagues
Systems Thinking	• Set up new support systems for refugees in the district • Added district resources for multilingual families, including interpretation services • Became *REFP* facilitators, and/or applied *REFP* learnings to education leadership work
Looped Learning	• Created surveys to gather refugee's experiences to inform district decision-making • Created new tools for relationship-building with families and students
Democratic Engagement	• Created district-wide culturally responsive literacy program with community liaisons • Set up systems to support refugee families during the pandemic involving community partners • Participated or presented in REA Webinar Series and/or Workshops
Digital Geographies	• Created digital intake forms to share with staff working with refugee/immigrant students • Developed digital processes to improve home-school communications for multilingual families

Educators' reflections on the course

"I became a better teacher for my students. I became more patient and understanding and empathic for them. And my top priority was inviting them to participate in a way they feel comfortable." – English as a New Language Coordinator, Cohort 2

Having taken the course, we asked participants to indicate the extent to which they felt prepared to work with refugee students and their families. **Figure 9** shows that most felt that the course prepared them *quite a bit* to *a lot*, to work with refugee students and with their families (72% and 61%, respectively).

Figure 9. Extent to which participants felt prepared to work with refugee students and families
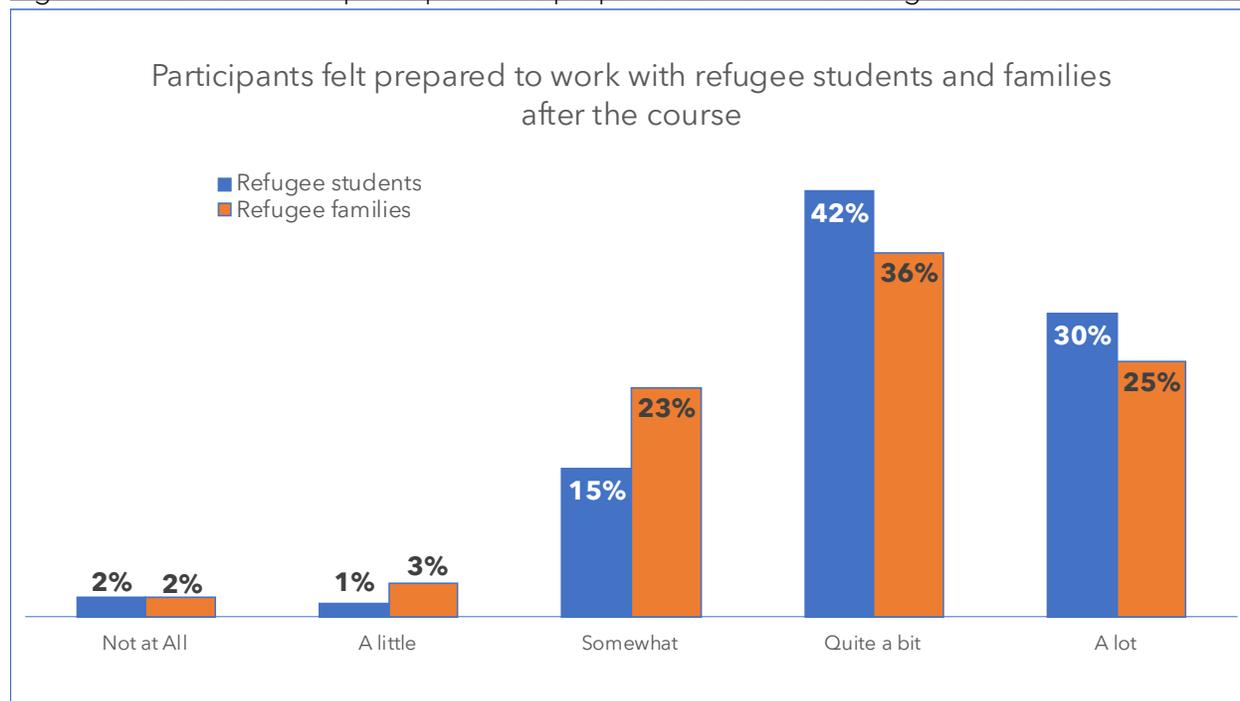
We also asked participants to rate on a scale of 0 (Not at All) to 10 (Extremely) how likely they were to recommend the course to a colleague. Of those who completed the post-course survey (n = 134 or 46% of course starters), the median response was 10 (Extremely). **Figure 10** shows the distribution of scores, with 52.2% at 10. This level of response is impressive: this group of largely experienced educators volunteered for and completed a course which required up to 9 months of their time during a pandemic that had a dramatic and long-lasting impact on teaching and learning for educators and students across the United States and globally.

Over 50% were extremely likely to recommend the course
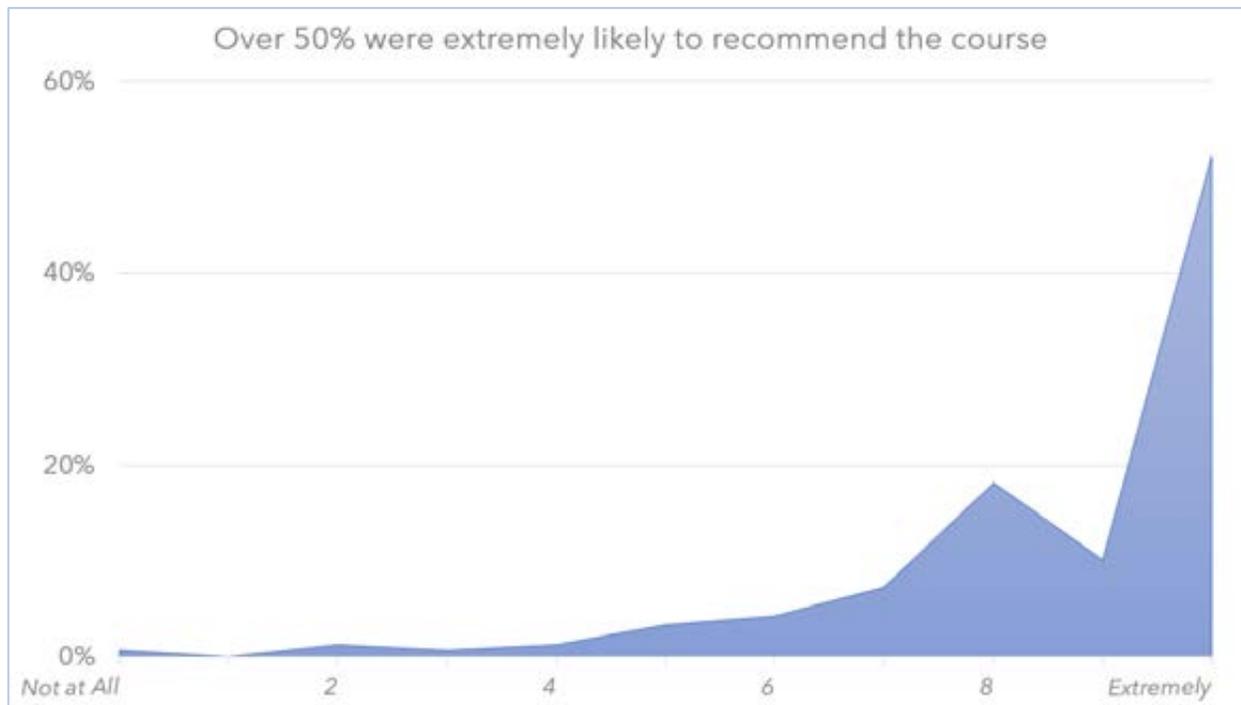
Interviews with the 9 course facilitators and 22 participants, including 27% who were unable to complete the course due to competing priorities, revealed how they regarded the course and its impact on their work with refugee students and families. Throughout the interviews, it was clear that a key benefit of the course was the community of practice it cultivated, around supporting refugee students and families. This community was especially valued during the COVID 19 pandemic, when educators felt more isolated from their colleagues and their students and families. As one facilitator observed,

> *"That networking piece is so important because you can say, 'I don't know what to do. I can throw my hands up. I don't know what to do.' A class like this allows for networking comradery. It's a safe-haven… especially during COVID, it became a safe place to sort of vent their concerns."*

The learning community produced value for *REFP* participants not only through emotional support but as a place for resources to share with colleagues. As one course facilitator noted,

> *"It's like having this giant conglomeration of information right there at their fingertips and it's also well-researched. There's so much of it I've shared with my school district and my teachers…In fact, we're doing some virtual professional development our first two days back and one of the participants from the course is going to be using the project that she created during the course to teach the middle school teachers."*

The learning community also stimulated educators to self-reflect. As one course participant stated,

> *"What I need to really grow is that community piece and the feedback piece on reflective process…I also participated in a group of participants within the program, where we offered ourselves as tribute for the topic of the week. We spoke about what our current challenge was, and then we were able to get feedback from the group. That was amazing and wonderful!"*

The other key benefit discussed most frequently was the rich set of resources for educators who work with refugee students and families. Participants cited the course videos, lesson plans and resource sharing among course participants as the most valuable features of the course. For some, the amount and range of resources was overwhelming, and they needed a way to prioritize so they could find what they needed more efficiently. This feedback led to changes in how the *REFP* resources were curated and shared in the pilot project.

Another benefit educators mentioned frequently was having a vocabulary for discussing issues related to working with refugee students and families, and the challenges they face when entering a new country and education system. As one educator explained,

> *"I have become more articulate in the way I advocate for students. I feel I have better resources and more grounded positions. I have always struggled to get my point across without getting caught up in ideological arguments or getting so passionate that I can't be heard. I now have the tools to make those same points in a way that more people can understand and follow—it makes me far more effective at my work."*

When asked how the course impacted their practice, educators had a wide range of responses. The most common responses reflected a shift in practices and beliefs that focused on the student as a whole person who needed more than academic supports, and who brought assets and value to the classroom. Examples from educators include,

> "It made me really try to connect with them [students] more … so we spent a lot of time talking, not actually doing academics and taking this course made me realize that sometimes that's a little bit more important, especially being virtual and things being so crazy in the world. It made me take a step back and realize that I really needed to reconnect with these kids."
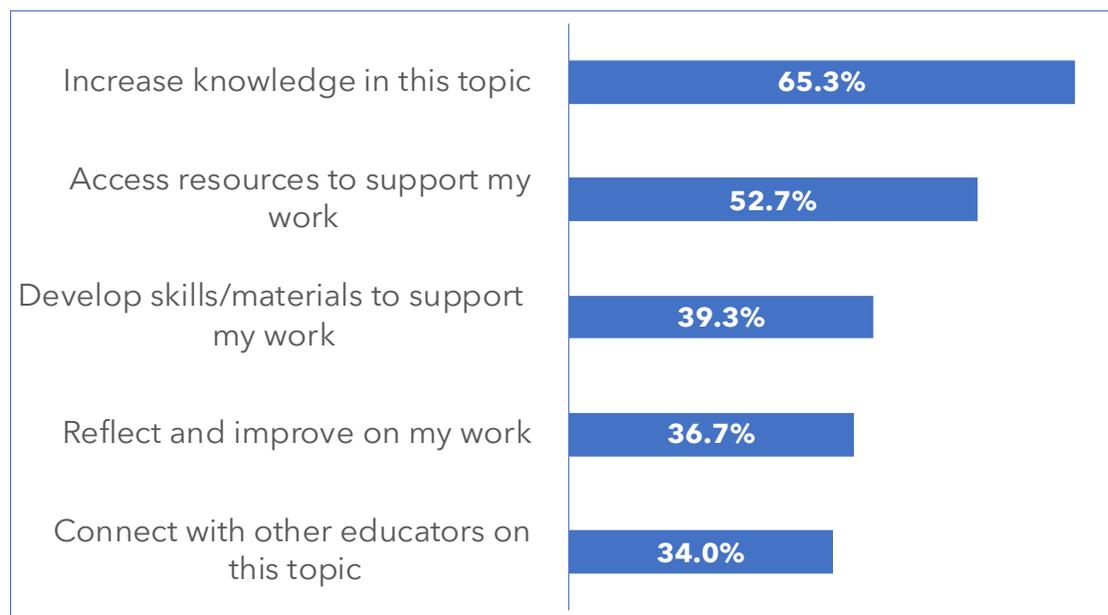>
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> "…just a different way of thinking. I think I now have a wider scope. It's not just about communicating, when you think about refugees. It's not just about language barriers. It's about their perception, and how they see the world, and then how they bring what they see into the academic setting. That reflection for me was huge as I participated in this course."
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> "For the first time, at the beginning of this year, I asked about family background and language background… and it's just opened my eyes to making sure that families have the resources they need…. Especially in the context of remote learning."

From the survey, educators emphasized the following "most significant changes" they made due to participating in the course. In order of frequency, the top 9 changes include:

1. Changes in teaching practices, e.g., incorporating SEL, creating a culturally responsive learning environment
2. Better appreciation for or understanding of students and their backgrounds, histories, and assets they bring to their learning
3. Reaching out, networking, and/or engaging with families
4. Creating or contributing to learning communities, e.g., sharing learnings from *REFP* with colleagues
5. Focus on social-emotional learning (SEL)
6. Advocating for students, supporting them in meeting their non-academic needs (e.g., supporting the "whole child")
7. Incorporating new resources and tools from the course
8. Reflecting more on own beliefs, practices
9. Becoming an agent of change, speaking out for what is right

Additionally, educators cited the following goals as their top 3 accomplishments due to participating in *REFP,* in order of frequency:

Goal	Percentage
Increase knowledge in this topic	65.3%
Access resources to support my work	52.7%
Develop skills/materials to support my work	39.3%
Reflect and improve on my work	36.7%
Connect with other educators on this topic	34.0%

Notably, this generally experienced group of educators believed that the course increased their knowledge and skills, as well as provided them with resources, an opportunity to reflect, and connection with others, all of which are part of the Sustainable Learning Framework on which *REFP* was built.

Implications for developing refugee educators

"Human relationships are the essential ingredient that catalyzes healthy development and learning." – The Learning Policy Institute[14]

The impact of the COVID 19 pandemic has generated what is likely to be a permanent change in K-12 and post-secondary education, for which we have yet to see the full impact. While the future remains unclear, it is starkly obvious that the pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities within our education systems (Kasper, 2021). The impact is felt hardest by culturally and linguistically diverse students, and other racialized and marginalized student groups, who struggled to access high quality learning opportunities prior to the pandemic, and now find it even more challenging (ibid, p. 53). In the United States, the Migration Policy Institute reported that if schools were to continue operating remotely during the fall of 2020, students who participated in poor quality distance learning would lose 7 to 11 months of learning, and those who couldn't participate could be 14 months behind (Sugarman & Lazarin, 2020). These issues underscore the importance of high quality education for all students, especially for those who are traditionally overlooked and underserved.

For decades, learning science has indicated that learning happens best in a positive, safe environment that is designed to support the learner's healthy growth and development. Research clearly demonstrates that stressors can affect learner's attention, learning, and behavior. Research also shows that these effects can be mitigated when students learn in a positive environment that offers secure relationships supporting academic, physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. Focusing on social emotional learning, positive school climate, trauma-informed instruction, and other strategies and approaches, are all geared toward teaching the "whole child," or *quality holistic learning*. As the Learning Policy Institute's "Educating the Whole Child" Research Brief reports:

> *Because children learn when they feel safe and supported, and their learning is impaired when they are fearful or traumatized, they need both supportive environments and well-developed abilities to manage stress. Therefore, it is important that schools provide a positive learning environment that allows students to learn social-emotional skills as well as academic content.*
> – Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, September 2018, p. 1

Educators who participated in the *REFP* pilot consistently reported that the most significant change they made in their work with students was in using a holistic approach to teaching and learning, in which they addressed not only the child's academic needs, but their social and emotional needs as well. This applied not only to teaching refugee students, but also to their non-refugee peers. As these educators shared through surveys and interviews, implementing a holistic approach to educating the whole child required empathy and understanding students as a whole person beyond their academic needs, building relationships with their families, and advocating for them with colleagues and in the community. Evidence from our

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[14] From the report "Educating the Whole Child" (September, 2018) by Linda Darling-Hammond and Channa Cook-Harvey, accessed at: https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/educating-whole-child-report

evaluation suggests that participating in *REFP* changed teacher competencies, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors by:

- **Shifting the focus to serving the whole child** through advocacy, working with families, addressing social and emotional needs, and creating a safe learning environment;
- **Increasing the use of effective instructional practices** for differentiating and personalizing learning, and using culturally responsive practices that value individual differences and create a sense of belonging;
- **Providing peer coaching and facilitated sessions** to enhance and sustain learning; and
- **Taking leadership outside the classroom** by having educators design their own learning, develop structured communities of practice, reflect on their practice, and create and share resources to support each other's growth.

REFP was designed using the Center for Learning in Practice *Sustainable Learning Framework*, referred to earlier in this report, as an intentional, structured way to engage educators in their own learning. By providing opportunities to cultivate a community of practice, the course offered opportunities to share and learn among educators with similar challenges and goals. As evidenced by our findings, being a highly qualified, highly competent refugee educator is distinct from being an English language teacher. In addition to supporting language development, refugee educators must obtain competencies in other pedagogical areas such as culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies, social and emotional learning, trauma-informed practice, universal design for learning, and many other areas of specialization.

Consistent with other research on teaching and learning, our findings suggest that schools and districts should not wait for or rely on a "hero teacher" to meet the challenges of educating refugee students on their own. It is our collective responsibility to support and advocate for these students and their families. Therefore, it is critical to engage school and district leaders in the focused learning and dialog offered by *REFP*, to collectively enhance empathy and understanding of refugee student and family needs and, the resources available, and to extend that empathy and understanding to other students and families in need. As educators in our evaluation reported, starting with empathy and understanding will help the education community to be better prepared to support advocacy and change efforts to meet the needs of the communities our education systems are intended to serve.

Limitations of this evaluation

Like all program evaluations, this one has its limitations. The study design does not allow for causal statements about the impact of the program, given that we did not have a matched group of educators working with refugee students who did not take the course, to compare outcomes. The outcomes reported here are self-reported, and therefore rely on the educator's perceptions of the impact of the course. Additionally, due to access restrictions and the scope of the project, we had no parent or student involvement in the evaluation to provide their own voices and feedback. Yet we know there is much to learn from them about changes they noticed, if any, in their classrooms after educators participated in the course. This is an opportunity for future evaluation studies and projects that could serve as a potential next step for enhancing our education system for refugee students and families.

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