

Building Educated Leaders for Life

OnTrack Greenville Evaluation Overview

Why is evaluation important to SIF? Part of SIF’s mission is to determine the effectiveness of programs it funds by requiring an evaluation and providing the technical assistance and funding to conduct evaluations. The purpose of evaluation is to build the evaluation capacity of nonprofit organizations and communities so they can successfully assess whether their programs are truly creating impact. In order to do this, SIF provides the expertise, resources, and infrastructure to conduct meaningful evaluations that demonstrate impact, moving programs from promising to proven. This is where the Riley Institute plays a role. As the third party evaluator, we are conducting an unbiased evaluation—we use evaluation as a way to recognize promising approaches and models to replicate and identify areas of vulnerability to further support, develop, or study.

Why is it important to learn about the implementation and impact of BELL?

- **Celebrate success stories.** By rigorously learning about BELL’s impact in Greenville, we will have rich sources of data to help tell the BELL story of student success.
- **Build evidence.** BELL already is an evidence-based program. This evaluation will add to the body of evidence, helping other similar communities learn more about what impacts to expect as they implement the model.
- **Scale to serve more students.** As we learn what is working really well, program leaders locally and nationally will be able to grow the program to serve more students in more communities.
- **Improve the program.** We will help identify opportunities for program stakeholders to adapt and innovate in order to improve services, fostering a culture of learning and continuous program improvement.

What will we learn about BELL? What questions are we trying to answer? We are trying to learn if students who participate in BELL’s summer program are doing better as a result of their participation. Some of the questions we will explore include: Do students’ reading and math skills increase after participating in BELL? Have students’ self-confidence and attitude toward learning improved? Are parents of participating students more engaged in their children’s education? And, in the academic years following participation, are students’ attendance, behavior, and course performance improving?

In addition, we are trying to learn what BELL implementation looks like at the OnTrack Greenville schools. We know how the program operates in theory, but we want to learn more about what implementation looks like in real life conditions. Some of the questions we will explore include: Does implementation look the same at all OnTrack Greenville schools? Are all BELL staff members receiving the training they need? Is BELL reaching the students and parents it should? Are students and parents satisfied with the quality of BELL’s program?

How will we know that the program is working? We will look at student outcomes two times per year, at the beginning of the academic year and at the end of the academic year, as well as at the beginning and end of the summer program. That will allow us to see if students are improving over time. In addition, we will compare BELL students to similar students who did not participate in BELL. By having a comparison group of similar students, it will help us attribute positive results to participation in BELL.

How will we collect data? Greenville County Schools already collects data on student academic outcomes. A research and data sharing agreement with Greenville County Schools will provide information on student academic performance. We will invite parents and students to take surveys to help us learn about other outcomes. In order to learn more about program implementation, we will survey and interview program staff members and review program records to check for consistency.

Who is on the Research Team?

- **Riley Institute at Furman University.** The Riley Institute is leading the study on the **impact** of BELL. In addition, the Riley Institute is managing and organizing all parts of the evaluation.
- **RTI International.** RTI International is leading the study on the **implementation** of BELL. The Riley Institute is working closely with RTI International, coordinating each step of the evaluation process.
- **Social Innovation Fund.** As the primary funder of the initiative, SIF provides guidance on how to plan and conduct evaluations. SIF also provides final approval of all evaluation plans.
- **OnTrack Greenville.** As the SIF grantee and collective impact backbone organization, OnTrack Greenville is responsible for making sure all parts of the evaluation meets SIF guidelines. OnTrack Greenville reviews evaluation plans and creates a culture of learning for the entire initiative.
- **Greenville County Schools.** As the project site, Greenville County Schools reviews and approves all research activities with students and district employees, taking special care to protect student information.
- **BELL.** BELL staff members contribute to the evaluation plan and are important evaluation stakeholders, providing information and insight to the learning process.

Who is available to answer more questions about the evaluation? At the Riley Institute at Furman University, please contact Assistant Research Director **Dr. Tracy Waters** (tracy.waters@furman.edu; 864.294.3803). At Building Educated Leaders for Life, please contact Director of Evaluation **Mr. Bryan Hall** (bryan.hall@experiencebell.org; 617.740.0447).

