



Unintended Impact

How the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools Program Affected Its Educators' Job Satisfaction and Career Trajectories

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Introduction and Overview



"Being a teacher leader for the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools program in the Irving Independent School District has given me a huge leg up as I contemplate becoming an instructional technology coach. Being a student council sponsor just doesn't sell. You're a hot commodity if you have tech experience and experience as a teacher leader planning professional development related to the use of digital technologies. Last year, I applied to schools in districts closer to where my daughter will attend school and received calls from multiple schools, even those I did not contact. While I politely declined the opportunities, I know I'll have more."

Caitlin Williams

Teacher, Irving Independent School District

Background: The Origins of the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools Program and Its Intended and Unintended Impact

Big ideas that respond to the urgent educational needs of students often have unexpected impacts. Some are positive. Some are not. The unintended yet positive effects of the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools program include increased opportunities for career advancement for teachers like Caitlin Williams, and especially for the program's instructional technology coaches, as well as increased job satisfaction for teachers and coaches alike.

The Verizon Innovative Learning Schools program, part of a broader Verizon Innovative Learning education initiative, began in 2014 as a partnership between Verizon and Digital Promise with a first cohort of eight schools in four districts. Today, the program has reached 626 schools nationwide, over 620,000 students, and nearly 32,000 teachers across 11 cohorts.

11 • **626** • **620k** • **32k**
Cohorts Schools Students Teachers

At the heart of the program is a commitment to digital inclusion and equity. Rose Stuckey Kirk, senior vice president and chief corporate social responsibility officer for Verizon and generator of the big idea for Verizon Innovative Learning Schools back in 2012, says, "We [at Verizon] knew based on our research that there were so many students who did not have access to technology. These students miss out on the opportunity to learn about STEM topics like coding and AI, but also essential skills like digital collaboration, problem solving, and design thinking. At Verizon, we felt that we could leverage our strong network to help close the digital divide for these students, which led to the design of Verizon Innovative Learning Schools."

One of the pillars of the program therefore remains "Always Available Access," a commitment to providing all students in program-supported schools with 24/7 connectivity and access to devices to use at school, at home, and anywhere in between. The promise of devices and round-the-clock connectivity proved to be the hook for many if not most districts and schools that joined the effort. Most of the six district program leads interviewed for this publication noted that devices and connectivity were the primary reason they signed up. Olema Herrera, district supervisor of the instructional technology department for Florida's Miami-Dade County Public Schools, explains, "We are not a one-to-one district. Not having to worry about whether students have a computer is what first attracted us to the program. Having one-to-one devices has been a game changer."

But, as district program leads, Verizon, and Digital Promise understand, access to the internet and devices is far from enough. Instructional technology coaches who help teachers effectively blend technology into learning activities are paramount to a program that emphasizes professional learning. Carla Segarra, program lead and director of innovation and digital learning for New Jersey's New Brunswick Public Schools, says, "Sure, devices

were the hook, but we wanted to bring back the technology coaches we once had in the past—before we started work with Digital Promise and Verizon.” Herrera adds, “Without the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools coach, the program does not work.” New Jersey’s Newark Public Schools’ director of educational technology, Timothy Nellegar, explains why digital coaching is important: “Computers are nothing more than paperweights in our buildings unless we have good people to show teachers how to use them effectively with students. So, the linchpin of Verizon Innovative Learning Schools is the coaching.”



Another pillar of the program therefore remains “Powerful Professional Learning:” live and on-demand learning opportunities, customized support, and especially job-embedded coaching. Ryan Higgins, who oversees the program for Verizon, explains why it emphasizes professional learning:

We found that students and teachers were not using technology well. They were simply doing things like worksheets that they used to do on paper. The Verizon Innovative Learning Schools program wants students to do things that they could not do without tech, to create presentations and videos, for instance, or to collaborate with students working across schools and even the world.

Training Up and Supporting Instructional Technology Coaches: The Linchpin of the Transformation of Teaching and Learning in Verizon Innovative Learning Schools

Hired specifically for and supported by the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools program, instructional technology coaches have been key to the pedagogical transformation Higgins speaks of. In large part, this is because of the extensive training and support Digital Promise provides them. As they begin their tenures at the start of each school year, new coaches attend a four-day, in-person coach camp, where they practice coaching conversations, observe for technology integration in classrooms, and get a more in-depth look at coaching cycles. Digital Promise also pairs first-year coaches with experienced practicing coaches, with whom they meet regularly as they adjust to the demands of their new coaching routines.

As onboarding and support unfolds for first-year coaches, Digital Promise provides ongoing training and targeted assistance to all acting coaches through a series of webinars, in-person events, asynchronous online courses, community-based events, and cross-district problem-solving sessions based on emerging challenges. Designated Digital Promise staff members also coach the coaches through twice-per-month one-to-one sessions. While these sessions are personalized to account for coaches’ personal growth needs and individual school-based

challenges, Digital Promise staff often help coaches analyze data they collect twice a year as they plot subsets of teachers on a continuum of stages described by the [Technology Integration Matrix](#). Using this analysis, coaches design professional learning strategies for individual and clusters of teachers. The coaches' goal is to advance each of them on the matrix—eventually to the final stage in which teachers demonstrate the ability to facilitate higher-order learning activities that may not be possible without technology.

While Digital Promise provides these professional learning opportunities to coaches, coaches in turn use what they learn to structure coaching activities that help teachers integrate technology into their instruction. Together, teacher and coach identify a goal or goals that will help the teacher move beyond where they are on the matrix. They rally around reaching the goal(s) by first identifying areas for growth and then embarking on multiple iterations of practice, including co-teaching, coupled with ongoing feedback and assessments of progress. Teachers also participate in learning groups facilitated by coaches, targeting specific content or common growth areas. Finally, coaches typically lead a Teacher Leader Corps in each school. A select group of highly motivated, engaged teachers committed to the mission of Verizon Innovative Learning Schools and adult learning, the team serves as a champion of the program and designs and implements professional learning activities for its teaching colleagues.

Intended and Unintended Impact of the Program's Emphasis on Professional Learning

The program's focus on extensive training and support for coaches and their consequent work with teachers has produced intended results. For instance, Digital Promise researchers operating independently from the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools program analyzed results from three surveys administered across the 2022-23 school year to a recent cohort of teachers, coaches, and district IT and professional learning leads who were participants in the program. The team's analysis of the survey data showed that teachers' perceived technological proficiency, skills, confidence to use technology, the frequency of its use, and instances of [Powerful Learning](#) in classrooms all increased over time. Further, the team found that more time with coaches was significantly associated with better teaching outcomes and significantly higher teacher self-reported technological proficiency and growth in practice. Again, these were outcomes that Verizon and Digital Promise intended when the program launched, with its emphasis on professional learning.

At the same time, something interesting, something exciting, something never intended seemed to be happening to the program's teachers and coaches. Jean-Claude Brizard, Digital Promise's president and CEO, speaks to the epiphany Verizon and Digital Promise had after looking more closely at what was transpiring in Texas' Irving Independent School District:

We were struck by the number of Irving's Verizon Innovative Learning Schools coaches who appeared to have taken what they learned through the training and support we provided them, and their lived experience as coaches, to move into administrative roles and other positions both inside and outside the district. In Irving, we also heard in conversations with the program lead and coaches that the effort may be resulting

in increased job satisfaction for teachers and coaches as well. We wondered, “Is the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools program having an unintended impact on teachers and coaches across its network of schools? Is it actually paving the way for new career opportunities, making a tough job a little less difficult, and helping make those jobs more satisfying?”

The remainder of this publication is our initial investigation of these questions in the context of six of the program’s school districts. We suspect that those involved in similar technology-based instructional initiatives may have similar questions that we hope this publication will help them answer. We begin our exploration by sharing the story of the Irving Independent School District to show why it inspired us to examine the topic of career advancement and job satisfaction more deeply in the context of the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools program. We then tell the stories of individual districts, teachers, and coaches that are based on what we learned from 27 interviews and two focus groups. We also share survey data and make observations about what may be leading to increased career advancement opportunities and job satisfaction—often through the words of teachers and coaches themselves. In the end, we suggest why these effects, though unintended, have significance beyond individual coaches and teachers themselves.



Career Advancement and Job Satisfaction

in Irving Independent School District

The Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex is home to 7.6 million people, a passionate Dallas Cowboys fanbase, the second busiest airport in the world, and the Irving Independent School District (Irving ISD). Irving ISD serves one of the most racially and ethnically diverse communities in the United States and is a shining star in the constellation of Verizon Innovative Learning Schools. Thirteen Irving ISD schools—eight middle and five high schools—remain active participants in the program’s network, even though all the middle schools have alumni status and no longer receive financial support from the program. In these schools, and in the high schools, Irving ISD continues to implement the program with fidelity, including staffing the schools with coaches who continue to help teachers more skillfully integrate technology into instruction.



Career Advancement Among Irving ISD's Verizon Innovative Learning Schools Educators: A Byproduct of the Program's Investment in the Growth of Teachers and Coaches

James Tiggeman is Irving ISD's director of STEM and innovation and also the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools district lead. He has great appreciation for the program's coaches and calls them "superheroes" for their work during the pandemic. He continues to marvel, he says, at the contributions they are making to teaching and learning, even though they may have advanced into new positions both within and outside the school district. Remaining true to the program's philosophy of building skills and growing talent means that many coaches in particular inevitably move on to new jobs, though Irving teachers also advance into coaching positions. "I would like our coaches to coach forever, but the position is a springboard to new opportunities," Tiggeman says, adding, "We lose coaches to jobs inside and outside the district all the time." For instance, there are three former coaches in Irving ISD's curriculum and instruction department. Tiggeman is grateful for that fact: "That saves me time because they are doing what otherwise might be my job."

Vonda Nutt is one of Irving ISD's former coaches in the district's curriculum department. She taught for four years, coached for another four, became a curriculum and instruction specialist, and now serves as the elementary social studies coordinator. Her former coaching colleague, Justin Clark, began teaching in Galveston, Texas, in 2012, was hired as a Verizon Innovative Learning Schools coach in Irving in 2018, and in 2022 became the data solutions consultant for Texas' Region 10 Education Services Center, where he supports teachers and principals across North Texas. The job requires fluency across content, disciplines, and grade levels. Commenting on how the program prepared him for his new position, the already technology-fluent Clark says, "Verizon Innovative Learning Schools forced me to branch out in all content areas, to see the bigger picture, to start modeling and leading professional development, and learn to teach teachers."

Nutt's and Clark's career trajectories are not unique among former Irving ISD coaches. Fifty-six percent of educators who have served as Verizon Innovative Learning Schools coaches since 2017 "have been promoted to new positions," Tiggeman says. They have taken positions as school and district administrators in Irving ISD, at regional education service centers in Texas, in the private sector, and even in the city of Dallas.



The Story of Vonda Nutt: From “Device Lady” to Instructional Coordinator

In Vonda Nutt’s third year of teaching, she became a department chair. The new position gave her opportunities to design and implement professional learning. “When I started helping teachers, I decided that within five to 10 years, I wanted to be a coach,” Nutt says. On a much faster track, she became a Verizon Innovative Learning Schools coach after just her fourth year. In her first year as coach, she was somewhat plaintive about the role she played. She says that, then, “rollout and maintenance were such huge parts of the beginning of the program that it was hard to transition from that to an instructional coach in the eyes of teachers and administrators.” She adds, “That first year I was mainly the device lady.”

The next year, a new building leader gave Nutt leadership opportunities, including placing her on the school leadership team. “The heavens opened up, light came down from the sky, and angels were singing. It was just magical when I became an instructional leader,” Nutt says. She adds that when the principal deployed her as the program envisions, she had a huge increase in job satisfaction.

Nutt continued to advance into a first and then a second administrative position. What she learned through Verizon Innovative Learning Schools helped pave the way. She says that the program forced her to learn how to be an instructional leader; ask herself what good instruction looks like across grade levels; design professional learning for math, band, language arts and other subjects; and adopt a global perspective.

Tiggeman says that Nutt came to the table with natural abilities to teach adults anything. But he suggests that the program helped her develop extra skills, such as managing different systems, providing trainings to small groups and hundreds of adults, designing curriculum, and integrating technology into instruction. “The skills she developed as a Verizon Innovative Learning Schools coach made her a natural fit for her current role as an elementary school instructional coordinator,” Tiggeman says.

From teacher to department chair to instructional technology coach to curriculum and instruction specialist to elementary school social studies coordinator and potentially beyond, Nutt says she is grateful for what she wants most: “I need to grow.”



Job Satisfaction in Irving ISD

While it is easier to measure the program's impact on job advancement in Irving ISD by looking at the career trajectories of Nutt, Clark, and their former coaching colleagues, job satisfaction is far more difficult to assess. Tiggeman says that there is no hard data to show that participation in the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools program leads to greater job satisfaction in Irving. But he points out that "it's a really hard time to be a teacher," and that teachers and coaches often have told him that "their lives would have been even harder" and they might have quit "if they had not received the support that the program offered."

Irving ISD focus group participants observed that job satisfaction for teachers and coaches depends a lot on administrative support. One Irving educator remarked that there was a lot of administrative buy-in when schools first initiated the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools program—but that support sometimes diminished over time: "When we began the work, we [coaches] were important, and it was very satisfying. We had a lot of job satisfaction. When administration changes, however, sometimes it might not be as supportive, and the work is far less satisfying."

Still, there are factors other than the support of building leadership related to job satisfaction in Irving ISD. For teacher Caitlin Williams, student engagement is among them. She says that her participation in the program has raised her job satisfaction to the highest of levels. "Why?" she asks. "Because as a teacher you want your students to take ownership of their own learning and growth, to be able to track their own data, and choose informational texts related to their own interests. They are doing things on devices that they couldn't do before they had them. That's very exciting as a teacher."

"I can't wait to see what's next for our teachers and coaches," says Tiggeman. "Our hope is that their participation in the program will make their lives a little less hard, their jobs more enjoyable, and their impact on students profound, whether they are in Irving or someplace else."



Promising Signs Beyond Irving ISD:

Career Advancement Across the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools Network



"This is a time in education when there are great educational challenges. Having strong digital skills gives educators greater abilities to address these challenges compared to others who are trapped using tools that are outdated."

Richard Culatta

CEO, International Society for Technology in Education



While our intuition tells us that the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools program leads to new job opportunities for teachers and especially coaches, we acknowledge that some teachers are content with their current job placements and have no desire to move to those that would take them out of their classrooms. There are also coaches who would be excited to take what they've learned through the program and return to the classroom. Broward County Public Schools coach Danielle Rosen, for instance, says she is open to career advancement opportunities and would be remiss if she did not consider them. "But part of me," she says, "is happily willing to go back to the classroom where I can use what I've learned to perfect my craft."

Still, a remarkable number of Verizon Innovative Learning Schools teachers and coaches have already progressed or are considering advancing their careers inside and outside their current systems.

Career Advancement for Teachers

Teachers' opportunities for advancement lay both inside and outside their role as classroom teachers. Five of the six teachers we interviewed are considering making the leap out of the classroom into the role of instructional technology coach, preferably, they say, within a Verizon Innovative Learning School if positions become available.

Jovana Maximilian from Miami-Dade County is considering becoming a coach. She says that Verizon Innovative Learning Schools has prepared her for the leap. She remains a bit hesitant, however. As many teachers do, she feels the powerful push-pull of leaving the classroom. For her, the pull is getting stronger. She says that "while leaving the classroom is a big career move, I am definitely thinking about digital tech coaching. If I can help teachers become amazing digital classroom teachers and have students come back to them and say how grateful they are that they can now apply wonderful digital resources to their learning, just as my former students have said to me, I would love that."

The majority of teachers in Kentucky's Jefferson County Public Schools and Miami-Dade County Public Schools in Florida believe, like Maximilian, that the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools program has opened up options outside the classroom. The survey Digital Promise administered to this sample shows that 51 percent of teachers from these districts agree that their career advancement opportunities have been enhanced by the program. And 59 percent agree that the program has provided other teachers with career advancement opportunities.



59%

of teachers agree that the program has provided other teachers with career advancement opportunities.

Teachers report that the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools program provides them with opportunities to advance into leadership positions while remaining in the classroom

Kennita Ballard is one among many of the program's teachers who chooses to stick with her passion—teaching. Nevertheless, she believes she has advanced her career by taking on a leadership position related to the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools program in a school that resides in a Black community in Louisville, Kentucky. She has little interest in becoming a coach but leads her school's effort to help Black students imagine and develop the skills to pursue careers in technology:

I maybe don't want to be a coach. The coaches I have been around are such skilled individuals. But I have taken leadership of the student technology leadership team. I'm really able to support students, to take technology and competence in technology to new levels and help students become technology leaders. That's always been important to me. As a Black teacher myself, it's important for me to model to Black students that we are in STEAM. We are in tech.

Teachers see the doors to leadership that the program has opened up, such as the one Ballard has walked through. The majority of 181 Miami-Dade County and Jefferson County, Kentucky, teachers (59%) who responded to a survey administered by Digital Promise say that Verizon Innovative Learning Schools provides leadership opportunities for them. When asked if it provides opportunities for their colleagues, that figure grows to 67 percent.



Career Advancement for Coaches

Coaches see that the program creates opportunities as well. Survey data from a sample of coaches from Miami-Dade County reveals that more than half of coaches (57%) agree or strongly agree that the program provides opportunities for advancement. Moreover, many coaches across the total network of the program's schools have leveraged what they learned through the program to take on new positions. Among them are the former coaches we interviewed: Vonda Nutt of Irving, who is now a district instructional coordinator; two district supervisors for educational technology—Elizabeth Majano from Newark and Jamie Schoenbach from New Brunswick (who recently left that position to take a new one at an education for-profit specializing in professional learning); Justin Clark, a consultant at a regional education services center and formerly an Irving coach; and even employees of Digital Promise itself—Sara Meierding and Jim Unger, former coaches in Jefferson County, Kentucky.

Newark's Elizabeth Majano: Former Coach and Current Supervisor of Educational Technology

Elizabeth Majano was once a computer science teacher. She already had a good awareness of tech tools and other products when she was recruited into Newark Public Schools by Alejandro Lopez, principal of Newark's Hawkins Street School. Majano coached for two years and recently became the district's supervisor of educational technology.

Though already tech savvy, Majano downplays that fact and says what's most important is to be adaptable, learn new technologies as they emerge, and have the ability to make decisions about what technologies and apps are best suited for classroom needs: "I always feel I'm behind because tech changes so often, and there's a million different apps for the same thing," she says. "You have to be able to decide what's best." Having the skills to work with adults is paramount, however, she says: "Verizon Innovative Learning Schools prepared me for my new position because it provided me with my first opportunity to step into and develop the skills for a coaching and quasi-leadership position."

During her years as a coach, she received support from both program lead Timothy Nellegar and Digital Promise to develop her coaching skills. Nellegar says that "one of the biggest things we worked on with Elizabeth was learning how to work with adults. She learned the coaching piece in a really strong way."

Cameron Lineberger, the Digital Promise lead for Newark, specifies the skills for working with adults that Majano picked up when she was a coach and that she'll likely employ with expertise in her new position: "building effective coaching routines, knowing when to visit classes and co-teach lessons, how to provide targeted instructional support, develop and conduct professional learning communities, and create meeting structures for whole group instruction—the different menus of options she uses."

"I'm glad I'm still a coach," Majano says, "only on a much broader scale."



How does the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools program prepare coaches for new career opportunities?

We interviewed Elizabeth Majano and her former coaching colleagues across six school districts to answer this question. We asked them to identify the skills they developed through the program that readied them for their new positions. Digital Promise's Sara Meierding, a former Jefferson County, Kentucky, coach, captures the essence of what they told us. Meierding suggests that there is a complexity of skills required to coach in the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools program that coaches carry forward into new positions:

Being a coach in the program is unique. It's different than being an instructional coach. There's a lot more stakeholder management. Your focus is your teachers, your school, your students, Digital Promise, and Verizon. I had to develop project management skills and even reach out to community partners. In one instance, I worked with a non-profit in the Louisville community to develop a drone partnership with our school. And all these skills are on top of being skilled in and adaptive to technology and most importantly being an effective leader and coach of adults.

It is the combination of these abilities, Meierding says, that makes Verizon Innovative Learning Schools coaches marketable, both within and outside their districts. With these acquired skills, former coaches are broadening their impact, often reaching more teachers and as a result having an impact on greater numbers of students.

Verizon Innovative Learning Schools
and Job Satisfaction:

More Promising Signs



"My colleagues have many 'aha' moments and greater joy. The greatest joy a teacher can have is when they see the satisfaction and joy students get out of what you're doing with technology. The greatest joy is kids buying into it. It's a buzz. They'll tell other teachers, and they'll try it too. They see the joy in using technology, and when they get into it, that's huge."

Jovana Maximilian

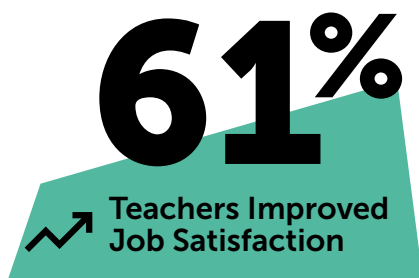
Teacher, Miami-Dade County Public Schools



The United States has a teacher job satisfaction problem. Job satisfaction hit a [historic low](#) in 2022. According to the [Merrimack College annual teacher survey](#), it appears to have improved in 2023. Still, one-third of teachers say they are not satisfied with their jobs. And, as EdWeek [reports](#) about the survey, “More than half of teachers say they likely wouldn’t advise their younger selves to pursue a career in teaching. About half still don’t feel respected by the general public. And while many indicators [of job satisfaction] have improved from last year, they are significantly lower than a decade ago.”

Digital Promise understands that the topic of job satisfaction is far more nuanced than judging simply whether Verizon Innovative Learning Schools participants are advancing in their careers and identifying how the program helps propel them into new positions. Job satisfaction for teachers and coaches is the result of a complex interplay among a variety of indicators, including the two the Merrimack College survey measures: whether teachers would go into the profession if they had it to do all over again, and feeling respected by the public. There are also a number of others such as workload, working conditions, opportunities for collaboration and leadership, work-life balance, and supportive building leadership.

Despite these nuances, still we find promising signs that the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools program is playing some small part in reversing trends that have led to nationwide teacher job satisfaction levels that in 2023 [were significantly lower than they were a decade before](#). We also are reading signs that the program has increased satisfaction levels for coaches as well.



Survey results show that the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools program increased job satisfaction levels for teachers.

Our 2024 survey sample of Jefferson County, Kentucky, and Miami-Dade County teachers provides evidence that there is a positive correlation between the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools program and improved job satisfaction. Sixty-one percent of teachers surveyed indicated that participating in Verizon Innovative Learning Schools improved it.



Survey results show improved job satisfaction for coaches, as well.

Results of a 2024 sample survey of Miami-Dade County coaches reveal that before program implementation, 50 percent said that their job satisfaction was neither high nor low. The other 50 percent said that they were somewhat satisfied (36%) or completely satisfied (14%). However, in response to a question about whether the program has had a direct impact on their satisfaction, 71 percent of coaches said that participation improved it extensively (50%) or moderately (21%).

Job Satisfaction for a Teacher in New Brunswick Public Schools

New Brunswick Public Schools' Verizon Innovative Learning Schools lead Carla Segarra believes that job satisfaction in Verizon-funded schools is higher: "I find that teachers have a better culture. We can't underestimate the connection between student engagement and job satisfaction. In the program's schools, kids are excited; you see it when you walk into classrooms. When students are engaged there is less stress and pressure on a teacher. Teachers are also more engaged because they are learning new things and creating something new for kids."

Case in point is teacher Lisa Keenan. She is a veteran of 28 years and now a third-year program participant. She describes herself as an "older" teacher and says that "the older we get, the harder it is to accept new things." Pre-program, she says she frequently ran to her millennial colleagues for help with spreadsheets, data tracking, and apps. Reflecting on her own educational technology skill set, she says that before her work with coach Greg Pardo, she was a two on a scale of one to 10. The fact that she was a "two" had an impact on her job satisfaction: "It was such a daunting time in terms of teaching; the use of educational technologies was the biggest hurdle for me."

Pardo, she says, was looking for a teacher to "step up and be willing to try new things." Keenan accepted the challenge. Pardo introduced her to a tool no one else in New Brunswick was using: 3D printers. He also brought substantial additional resources into her classroom and taught her how to use virtual reality headsets to help her differentiate instruction and account for her learners' different needs. "The kids love it and are more engaged," she says, adding that that engagement has had an impact on her joy for teaching.

Pardo's work with teachers in two schools is comprehensive, and Keenan has benefited from that, as well. He supports tech groups, brings teachers together for professional learning, goes to teacher planning time, and performs coaching cycles with teachers, staying all the way to the end of lessons.

Pardo's individual work with Keenan has had a substantial impact on her abilities. She believes she's now a seven on a scale of one to 10. And she has far greater job satisfaction as a result: "I feel much more in control, much more satisfied, and the job is so much easier now."

"My millennial friends now run to me."

Key Reasons for Increased Job Satisfaction for Teachers and Coaches in Verizon Innovative Learning Schools

Interviews of teachers and coaches did not uncover a distinct reason for increased job satisfaction, but a multiplicity of them. Among them, three stood out.

1

The availability and effective use of technology impacts job satisfaction.

Miami-Dade County's Jovana Maximilian provides insight into the interplay between her students having access to devices and her own job satisfaction: "The Verizon Innovative Learning Schools program definitely helps with job satisfaction. Here's how I know: It takes about a month for tablets to roll out to students at the start of the year. That month is very frustrating to me. That month when my students don't have access is tough. They use their phones, but it's hardly the same. I'm edgy. I'm annoyed—so annoyed. And I'm stressed. Once those tablets arrive that stress comes to an end because my students start doing amazing, creative things that they could not do without them. They learn so much more and are excited about their learning. So, yes, the program and what I have learned about how to use technology really do help my job satisfaction."

2

Increased student engagement leads to better job satisfaction.

Carla Segarra of New Brunswick Public Schools reminds us that there is a big connection between that engagement and teacher satisfaction: "In schools implementing the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools program, kids are excited. When students are engaged and excited there is less stress and pressure on a teacher." Kennita Ballard from Jefferson County Public Schools couldn't agree more. Although she believes that all the technologies she's learning and introducing in her classroom "keep things from getting stale" and that most recently AI discussions in her school have "refilled [her] cup," the biggest distinguisher for her is student engagement:

It's not the tablet that brings me joy; it's what my students produce with it and how they collaborate with it that brings me joy. Now as I watch my students prepare their high school applications, I see them pulling stuff they did in the sixth grade out of their drives. That brings me joy. Verizon Innovative Learning Schools has definitely increased my job satisfaction.

3

The Verizon Innovative Learning Schools program creates better work-life balance.

Having a life outside of the job—or better work-life balance—was identified by some interviewees as key to increased job satisfaction. Christina Ingraham-Luly, a teacher from Broward County Public Schools in Florida, believes that Verizon Innovative Learning Schools has improved the balance between her work and life: "I would say I spend less time working out of school hours now. I'm managing time overall because of the convenience that being digitally connected provides. I get more stuff done in school. This has an impact on my joy. I know I can get things done faster and more efficiently than if I were doing things by hand. I have greater work-life balance for sure."

A survey of a recent cohort of coaches **revealed that for 54 percent of them, better work-life balance was among the top three reasons they wanted to become coaches.** Elizabeth Majano, a former coach in Newark, is among those who found that the way she spends her time after school changed when she became a coach and then a district administrator. She notes that there were times as a coach when she had “a ton of things to do,” and “pressure to show [her] impact;” however she notes that her life after the school day changed once she took on her coaching role: “Instead of having the pressure of grading and extended lesson development that classroom teachers face, I am able to have time for research and development of topics that are of my choosing and of interest to me.”

Olema Herrera, program lead for Miami-Dade County Public Schools, says that the program components in totality add up to better, stronger, and more satisfying school cultures that “are like dreams that others have yet to experience but that I hope someday will.”



Concluding Thoughts



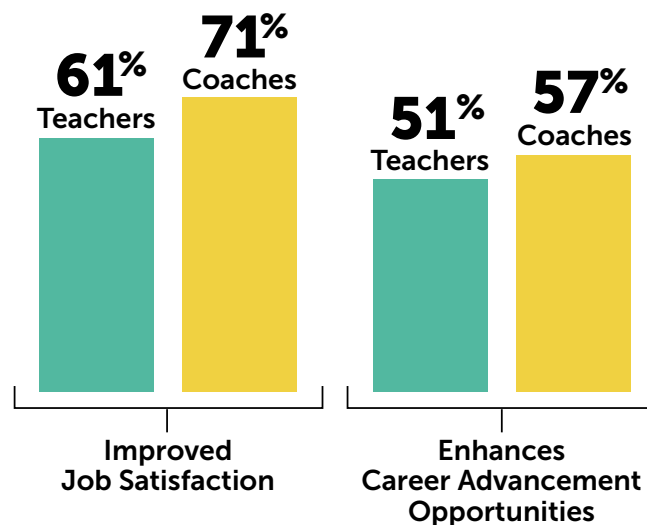
"We're sometimes tempted to think of coach turnover as a bad thing. But it is not. Why? Because coaches often move on and have a bigger impact. Even when folks leave for non-Verizon Innovative Learning Schools, I know they are taking the skills we have fostered in them to other places and leading from those skills. It is how we are spreading the goals of digital equity more broadly in places we may not have a partnership with."

Vanessa Zurita

*Director of Onboarding and Coaching, Verizon Innovative Learning Schools team, Digital Promise
Former Verizon Innovative Learning Schools Coach*



Our initial exploration of the connection between the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools program and teacher and coach job satisfaction and career advancement for both sets of educators makes us more certain that what we saw happening in Irving Independent School District is not uncommon across the program's network of schools. On top of the testimonies we heard, the numbers speak for themselves:



- **Sixty-one percent of teachers** surveyed indicated that participating in the program improved their job satisfaction.
- **Seventy-one percent of coaches from Miami-Dade County Public Schools** reported that their involvement in the program increased their satisfaction levels.
- **Fifty-nine percent of teachers** surveyed reported that Verizon Innovative Learning Schools provides new leadership opportunities to them. **Sixty-seven percent** observed that it does so for their colleagues. This is important because these opportunities prepare teachers to take on new roles should they decide to leave the classroom. We are reminded of Irving ISD's Caitlin Williams, who says that her experience designing and implementing professional learning as a member of her school's Teacher Leader Corps has helped prepare her to become an instructional technology coach, within or outside the program's network.
- **Fifty-one percent of teachers** surveyed reported that the program has enhanced their career opportunities, and **59 percent said it boosted opportunities** for their teaching colleagues.
- **Fifty-seven percent of Miami-Dade County Public Schools coaches** agreed or strongly agreed that the program enhances opportunities for career advancement.

What was once a hunch that the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools program may be having unintended positive impacts on teachers and coaches has evolved into a sense of greater certainty. Yet we now have another hunch. We think it's possible that other district-based programs that have built similar enterprises with the same goal of increasing digital equity and inclusion may be seeing these same impacts. We know, have worked with, and have written about these districts. Their students also have 24/7 access to the internet and devices and teachers who enjoy the support of well-trained instructional technology coaches and robust professional learning activities. Though our suspicion is not yet backed by data or the testimonials of teachers and coaches in their districts, we intuit that they may be improving job satisfaction and providing increased opportunities for career advancement as well.

These effects—whether they result from the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools program or similar efforts elsewhere—are less important as ends in and of themselves than as means to achieving broader educational goals:

- **First**, educators who leverage what they have learned through the program to advance their careers are clarions for digital equity and inclusion and the effective, creative, innovative use of digital technologies in instruction. When coaches, for example, move into new positions inside or outside the districts in which they are currently employed, they expand their reach; have impact on more and more adults and students; develop new, more digitally informed curricula; and help more and more educators become comfortable with technology and use it more frequently—all in service of more powerful learning. Those who advance in their careers are multipliers of the program’s vision to foster greater digital equity in access and use.
- **Second**, we can’t forget that [more than half of American teachers would advise their younger selves not to go into the profession](#), and that many leave their jobs because, as James Tiggeman of Irving ISD reminds us, “It is a really hard time to be a teacher.” The Verizon Innovative Learning Schools program, Tiggeman believes, mitigates these difficult times, observing that absent the program teachers’ lives would be harder and “they might have quit if they had not received support the program offered.” Verizon Innovative Learning Schools and other like-efforts in fact may be making small and humble dents in America’s nagging teacher satisfaction problem, chipping away at obstacles that block the joy of teachers and make it more difficult to stay in a school, a district, or a profession. It’s not lost on us that many we interviewed for this publication spoke of the “joy” they experience as a result of their participation in the program, an emotion that is much more powerful—and influential—than “satisfaction.”

We understand that not every Verizon Innovative Learning Schools teacher and coach can see or want to walk through doors to new job opportunities that the program appears to provide. But we are encouraged that so many do and will carry the joy and the skills they have developed through the program with them wherever they go—or if they remain where they are.

Irving ISD teacher Caitlin Williams sums up for us what we now more firmly believe is happening because of the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools program and, as we intuit, possibly other robust efforts like it:

My participation as a teacher in Verizon Innovative Learning Schools I believe has had a significant impact on me. It has changed my outlook on my profession and has given me new skills. I can’t tell you how satisfying it is to see my colleagues develop their own skills as a result of the professional learning I have helped design and to hear about how their students have become more engaged and excited about learning as a result. I don’t know what is in store for me for the rest of my career, or whether I will move on from teaching and become an instructional technology coach within the Verizon-Digital Promise network of schools or in a school that is not a partner. Regardless of what I do or where I go, I know I will carry what I learned in the program with me. Whatever I decide, I know I will have an impact.

We suspect great things are in store for Williams and for many of her teaching and coaching colleagues across our network of schools. We look forward to watching how they extend their reach and foster greater digital equity and inclusion at greater scale across school districts, regions, states, and even broad swaths of the country. Our nation's students who have been on the wrong end of digital divides are depending on it.



Suggested Citation

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