CREATING AN IMPROVEMENT NETWORK TO ENHANCE THE RESULTS OBTAINED BY AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING PROGRAM IN A RURAL COMMUNITY

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Background

Learning English as a foreign language contributes to students' prospects of global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity.

Global citizenship is particularly relevant for rural communities, where the isolation of the areas may cause lower exposure to cultural diversity than in urban communities.

WE LEARN

We Learn is a program whose aim is to broaden the opportunities in early childhood of learning English as a foreign language in public schools from rural communities. It was created in 2006 and it currently gives assistance to 14 schools from 2 school districts in Chile.

The We Learn Improvement Network

Different types of expertise working together:
- 4 improvement experts
- 2 local education authorities
- 2 coaches on English Teaching
- 6 academic coordinators
- 14 school leaders
- 9 English teachers

Schools in rural communities tend to work in isolation from one another, which is why the creation of an improvement network was an innovation worth testing to encourage students' progress within the intervened schools.

The rationale was that building local capabilities, motivating professionals to learn from each other in peer collaboration and having different types of expertise working together towards a shared goal would improve the program's system and translate into higher progress in English language learning in students.

Framing improvement opportunities

OUR GOAL

During 1 academic school year, 60% of 1st and 2nd grade students from 14 participating schools will achieve an advanced level of English competency, with NO students scoring in the beginner level by the end of 2018.

PRIMARY DRIVERS
- Maximizing Instructional Time and learning opportunities
- Improving interactions in the EFL classroom
- Developing improvement leaders at schools
- Increasing english exposure outside the classroom

This was the network's goal and the primary drivers to work on. The theory was that by working on improving the four drivers, we would achieve the goal on the left. The network decided on relevant metrics to measure improvement on each aspect, as well as instruments to collect the necessary data.
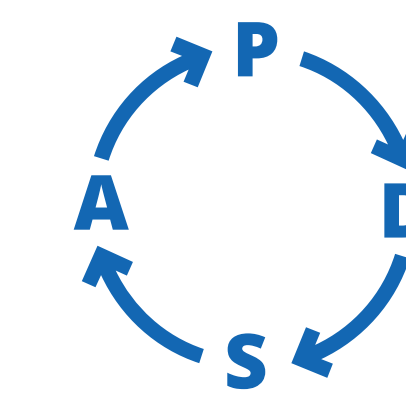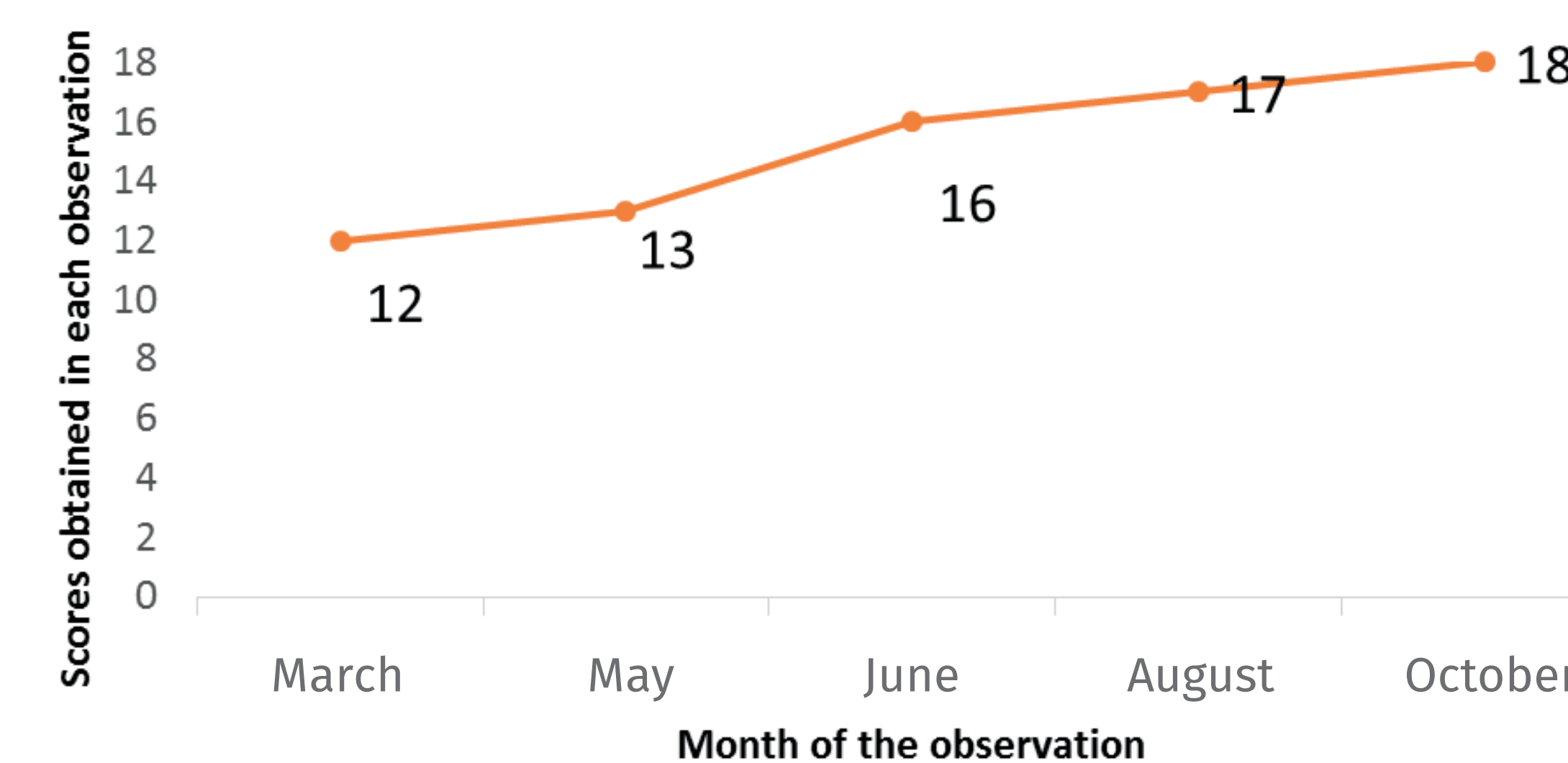
Testing ideas with improvement cycles

The network tested ideas to establish the four drivers throughout 2017 and 2018. Innovations at classroom, school and network level were developed and improved over time, leading the way towards better results and building a culture of data-based decision making in the network.

### Example: Improving interactions in english in the EFL classroom

Scores in class observations
Teacher 1 - We Learn Improvement Network

Scores obtained in each observation (y-axis 0–18): March 12, May 13, June 16, August 17, October 18
Month of the observation (x-axis)

Idea: Teaching students key classroom language to encourage the use of it spontaneously.
Findings: The teacher got 12 out of 18 points in class observations. Students were not using the classroom language as expected.
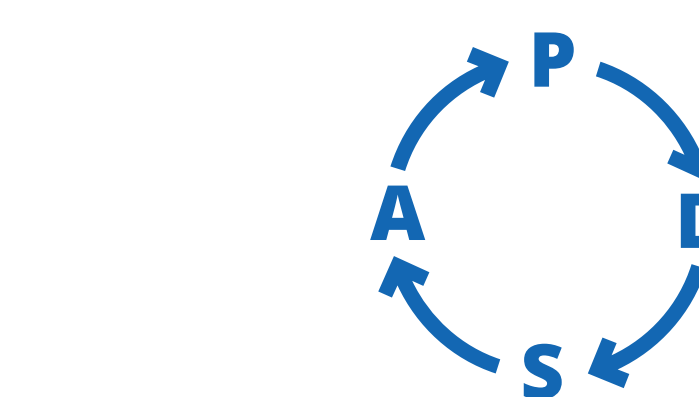
Idea: Having a score board to register students' use of key classroom language to encourage the use of it spontaneously.
Findings: The teacher got 13 and 16 out of 18 points in class observations in May and June. Involving students in measuring the use of classroom language, had good results observed in an increase in spontaneous interactions in the English class.
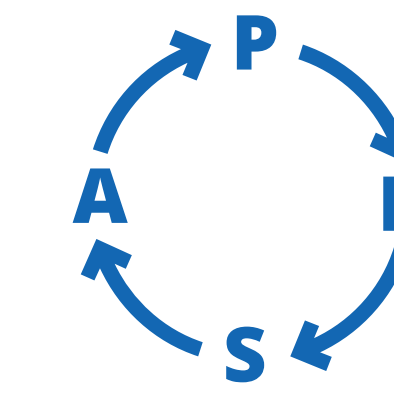
Idea: Having a score board to register students' use of key classroom language to encourage the use of it spontaneously, in the english class, adding the physical education classes and interactions with the school principal.
Findings: The teacher got the maximum score in october in class observation. Involving students in measuring the use of classroom language, plus adding other classes and teachers into the efforts for classroom language use resulted in having a significant number of spontaneous interactions in the English class.

### Example: Developing improvement leaders at schools

Average scores in leadership evaluation sheet
School 1 - We Learn Improvement Network

Average score (y-axis 0–6): 1st semester 2, 2nd semester 5
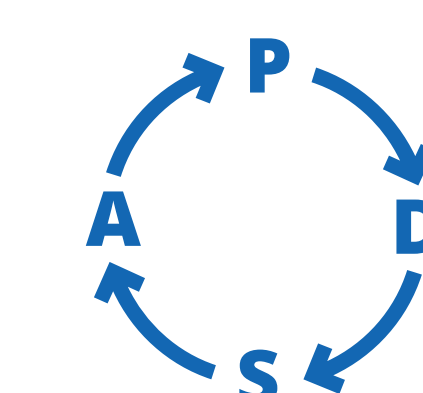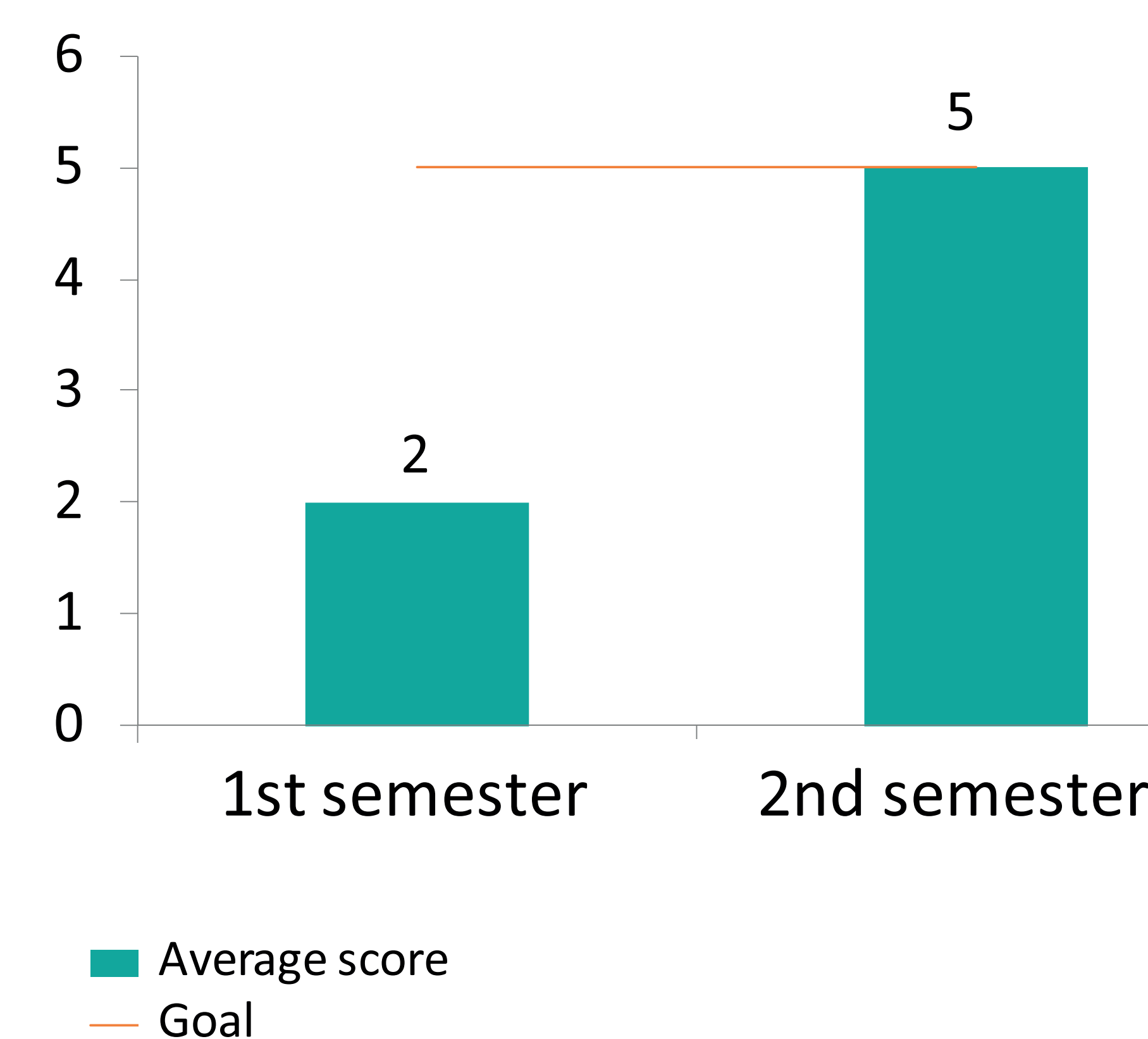
Idea: The principal lead sporadic data analysis meetings to check the development of the school's improvement plan.
Findings: The principal got insufficient score in an evaluation sheet that measures the effectiveness of the schools' improvement plan to achieve the networks' goal.
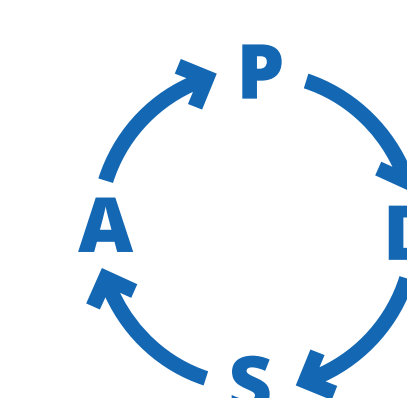
Idea: The principal created a calendar for data analysis meetings to check the development of the school's improvement plan.
Findings: The principal improved her score in the evaluation sheet that measures the effectiveness of the schools' improvement plan to achieve the networks' goal. Even though meetings were held, there were no clear roles in the team, leading towards ineffective meetings.
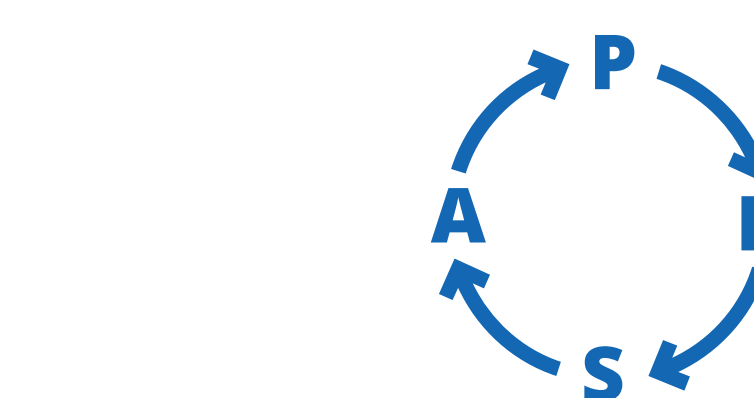
Idea: The principal created a calendar for data analysis meetings to check the development of the school's improvement plan. She distributed specific roles in her team and got more teachers involved, such as the special needs expert.
Findings: During the second semester, the principal got 5 points average, achieving the goal in the evaluation sheet that measures the effectiveness of the schools' improvement plan to achieve the networks' goal. Adding more members to the team, distributing specific roles and creating a calendar lead to following the development of the plan more closely, making timely decisions based on data and improving the overall success of the plan.

- Average score
- Goal

Sharing ideas among members of the network

At the network level, the Foundation created templates, materials and provided spaces to maximize the opportunities for sharing ideas among the members of the schools. Some innovations designed for sharing where:
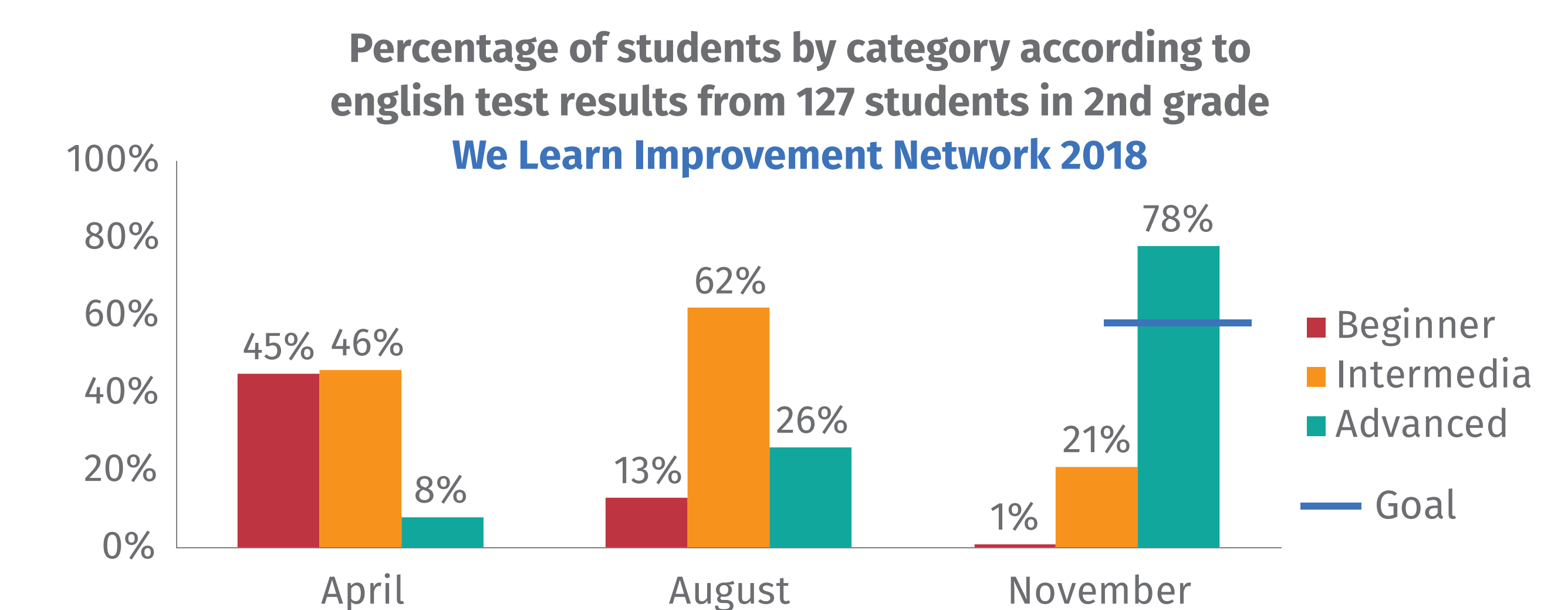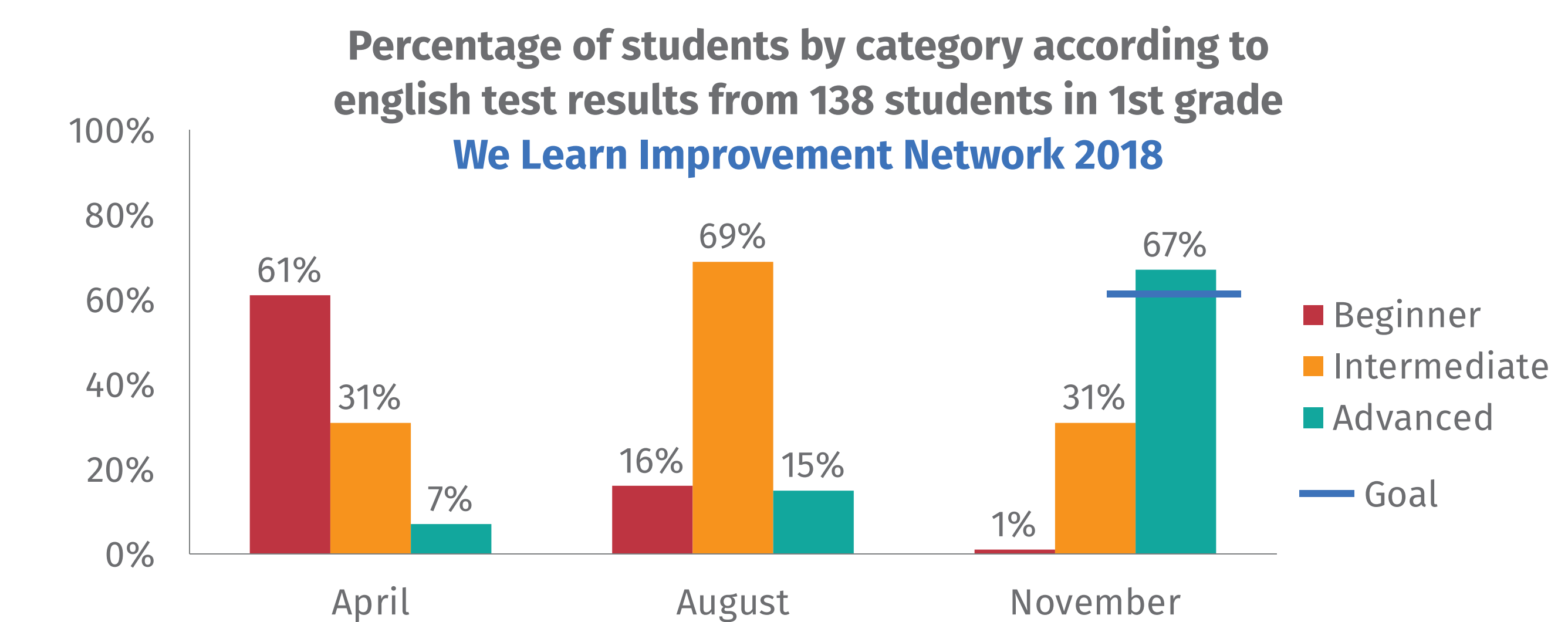
Visits among schools: teachers would observe lessons and ideas tested by their peers.

Ideas stands in learning sessions: school teams would prepare materials to share their ideas on stands.

Social media for innovation: teachers were encouraged to create social media accounts to share their experience with their peers.

Spreading ideas through coaching: when coaches from the Foundation meet with school teams, they share ideas tested in other schools that seem appropriate to their needs.

Results and findings

Percentage of students by category according to english test results from 138 students in 1st grade
We Learn Improvement Network 2018

Month	Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced
April	61%	31%	7%
August	16%	69%	15%
November	1%	31%	67%

Goal

Percentage of students by category according to english test results from 127 students in 2nd grade
We Learn Improvement Network 2018

Month	Beginner	Intermedia	Advanced
April	45%	46%	8%
August	13%	62%	26%
November	1%	21%	78%

Goal

The goal was surpassed in both 1st and 2nd grade in the advanced category. Only 2 students in 1st grade and 1 in 2nd grade remained in the beginner category by the end of year two.

The larger proportion of students achieving "advanced" English levels at the end of 2nd grade likely reflects a greater dosage. These students experienced English classrooms engaged in improvement work for two full years, in contrast to first graders who only received one year of such exposure.

Lessons learned

Collaborative work using the model for continuous improvement has lead to the acceleration of children's learning processes in the language.

Framing opportunities for improvement in various aspects inside and outside the classroom allowed for more actors to be involved and contribute with their expertise to the process.

A school that implemented an internal improvement team since the first year obtained better results than the others, achieving the goals in all four aspects proposed in the work plan plus the goal of student performance.

Having a collective driver diagram with a common goal to lead this two-year experience provided thrust to innovation among the network members.

Throughout year two, the ideas tested by principals, academic coordinators and teachers increased in the robustness of the design and metrics to understand whether they were improvements.