

Engaged Educators, Engaged Students:

Transforming Rural Costa Rican Schools

Key Findings | Sarapiquí District, Sarapiquí Region, Costa Rica | 2021 - 2022



86.3% of all TU students passed their classes at the end of the year.



Students showed a **particular strength in science**, with 88.9% passing the subject.



Students saw **+15.1 percentage points growth in literacy**, and **+3.7 percentage points growth in math** compared to controls.



99% of educators reported **feeling motivated to teach**, with an increase of 6.2% reporting **intentions to continue working as educators**.



+90% of teachers reported **improved teaching practices, ability to motivate disengaged students, and a belief in their impact on students' lives**.

when comparing TeachUNITED school pre- and post-assessment and/or to control schools



TeachUNITED conducted this Education Impact Study to get a systemic view of the impact our work has had in Sarapiquí, Heredia Province, Costa Rica. In the time since TeachUNITED started working in Sarapiquí, they have reached 1,012 educators in 85 schools, who in turn have served 61,796 students.

LEARNING CHALLENGES

Central America's public education is facing what is being called "the worst crisis in the last three decades (Sexto Estado de la Región, 2021). The region saw the longest school closures in the world due to COVID-19, where students lost an estimated 1.5 years of learning as two-thirds of all in-person school days were disrupted since the beginning of the pandemic. Currently, more than 62 percent of children under the age of 10 do not have reading comprehension skills, equating to 7.6 million children in Latin America (World Bank, 2021).

About Sarapiquí, Costa Rica

Sarapiquí's highly bio-diverse tropical rainforest and Sarapiquí River drive both agricultural and tourism-related economies. Sarapiquí also borders Nicaragua to the north and has seen an increase in refugees and migrant workers in recent years. While there has been a concerted effort to expand school access and enrollment in recent years, the region still struggles with improving student outcomes due to considerable barriers to learning:

- Repeated and significant disruptions of school cycles.
- New forms of educational exclusion.
- Ineffective teaching practices.



PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

TeachUNITED provides a full suite of research-based teaching strategies, job-embedded coaching, and small-cohort peer learning communities.

- Year 1: Cohorts of teachers are trained by TeachUNITED instructional coaches in strategies proven to close learning gaps of 2-3 years in a single school year (Hattie, 2012): Purpose and mindset, student engagement, personalization, data-driven instruction. Strategies are applied in the classroom throughout implementation and reflected upon during coaching sessions and small-cohort workshops
- Year 2: The trained year one cohorts facilitate the program for the other teachers within their school and/or district, serving as in-house instructional coaches to colleagues.

SARAPIQUÍ IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS

40+

Workshops

350

Coaching Sessions

93%

Program Completion

PROGRAM GOALS

The TeachUNITED program aims to deliver transformative best practices for teaching and learning, resulting in

- improved student outcomes.
- increased teacher effectiveness and motivation.
- sustained school improvement.

Aligned with SDG4, TeachUNITED is ensuring that underserved educators are empowered with high-impact strategies and tools. The program is localized to the challenges and needs of the schools and communities with which it is working, taking into account the limitations inherent in working with rural areas. This ensures that schools participating in the TeachUNITED program have a high-quality and sustainable program moving forward with teacher leaders who are trained to deliver the program for years to come.

THE IMPACT

The impact and outcomes of this study support the efficacy of the TeachUNITED program and mirror what research tells us: both teacher and student engagement is key to success in academic outcomes and personal well-being.

COLLABORATIVE & EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

TeachUNITED coaches trained educators in personalized learning strategies that provide for experiential learning and incorporate choice, carefully selected technology tools, and project-based work. Notably, given the focus on experiential learning, technology tools, and experimentation, TeachUNITED Sarapiquí students showed particular strength in science.

ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The TeachUNITED program equips local teachers with the skills needed to reach ambitious student achievement goals, close learning gaps, and become educational leaders in their communities. TeachUNITED Sarapiquí partner schools demonstrated this with significant growth scores, outpacing regional counterparts.

COLLECTIVE EFFICACY

Collective efficacy, one of the key tenets of TeachUNITED's program, is the group belief of teachers and leaders in their ability to positively impact students. John Hattie's most recent meta-analysis underscores that collective efficacy is a top factor (when implemented with fidelity) that will move the needle on student achievement. TeachUNITED has found that this type of efficacy tends to be sustaining, as schools continue to improve long after the completion of the TeachUNITED program.

"TeachUNITED is implementing something very good, and we are on the right track. I would like it to be possible to work in all regions of this country. And well, obviously, we have to continue working in my region because this all comes down to the productivity of the teacher in the classroom. And in the end, what is the most important thing to me? It's that students have a quality and cutting-edge education, and that is what we are seeing today."

- Marvin Sibaja, Sarapiquí Regional Director for MEP



Primary TU students' pass rates for science were 8.6% higher than those for control schools, and in intermediate grades, 95% of students grades six through eight passed science.



Primary: TU students outperformed their peers, registering an 85.4% pass rate compared to control schools' 81.9% pass rate.

Intermediate: TU students in grades six through eight registered even higher pass rates of 93.4%.



TU girls saw an 8.8 percent increase in their literacy and a 14.1 percent increase in their mathematics assessment results.



Over 90% of students at TU schools reported that:

- their teachers encourages them in their goals; takes the time to help them understand the material.
- they feel able to persist when learning something new or when making progress toward a goal.



By the end of the program, more than 90% of TeachUNITED participating teachers reported that:

- they can improve their teaching practice and engage students who are not motivated.
- they, their colleagues, and their schools have significant positive effects on their students' lives.



Hear from participating students, teachers, and educational leaders throughout Sarapiquí, Costa Rica.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

During all programs, TeachUNITED instructional coaches track lesson and assignment completion, webinar and coaching call attendance, and capstone project completions for graduation. Coaches also conduct classroom visits for observation and microteaching sessions using feedback rubrics. Participating teachers and their students also complete baseline and endline surveys on their attitudes, beliefs, and classroom practices.

Implementation Fidelity and Program Data

Baseline surveys are administered to teachers and to students near the beginning of the school year and endline near the end of the school year

Quantitative Assessments

Student pass rates, available for both full year and by content subject, are collected from schools. Analysis of this data provides insights into the impact of TeachUNITED's services on student achievement on a school and district level.

In addition, TeachUNITED also conducts student assessments to monitor the success of the program, using externally validated standardized assessments. Ten randomly selected students per grade per school (including control schools) take TeachUNITED assessments in literacy and mathematics. The early primary grades use a modified Early Grade Reading Assessment in Spanish. Later primary students and secondary students take easyCBM math and LearningAZ literacy assessments, also in Spanish. Assessments are completed online using Jotform or using offline form access, depending on access and connectivity.

Qualitative Interviews and Analysis

During this case study, qualitative interviews were conducted at the school, district, and regional levels. All interviewers were recorded and were semi-scripted and open-ended in order to gather additional insight from participants.

Full Study

To view the full study including expanded methods, study design, and citations, [please click here.](#)

ABOUT TEACHUNITED

TeachUNITED is a global nonprofit organization whose mission is to improve the quality of education in rural and historically underserved communities. TeachUNITED combines community-based teacher coaching with evidence-based pedagogical training in a philanthropically-supported, scalable package that allows local education leaders to own, co-design, and adapt context-specific strategies to increase academic achievement.

Aligned with SDG4, TeachUNITED is ensuring that underserved educators are empowered with high-impact strategies to increase academic achievement, develop each student's full potential, and break cycles of poverty.

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