

# Evaluation of the Teach For America (TFA) Program

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# Motivation for Studying TFA

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- The problem: poor schools face severe shortages of talented teachers
- TFA is a unique approach to teacher recruitment/preparation
- Both support for and criticism of approach
- Existing evidence is limited
- TFA is expanding rapidly
- Larger debate about alternative teacher routes

# Primary Research Question

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**Do TFA teachers improve (or, at least, not harm) student achievement relative to what would have happened in their absence?**

**The answer: Yes**

# Highly Rigorous Design

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- National sample—6 regions, 17 elementary schools, 100 classrooms, nearly 2,000 students
- Compare achievement of elementary students taught by TFA and control teachers *at the same grades in the same schools*
- Randomly assign students to teachers
- Data from standardized tests, school records, and a teacher survey

# Sample Reflects School Population Where TFA Places Teachers

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- **Poor Students**
  - 95 percent certified for free or reduced price lunch
- **Low Academic Achievers**
  - Score at 14<sup>th</sup> percentile in math, 13<sup>th</sup> in reading
  - 20 percent overage for grade
- **Minority Students**
  - 67 percent African American, 26 percent Hispanic

# Findings: Teacher Characteristics

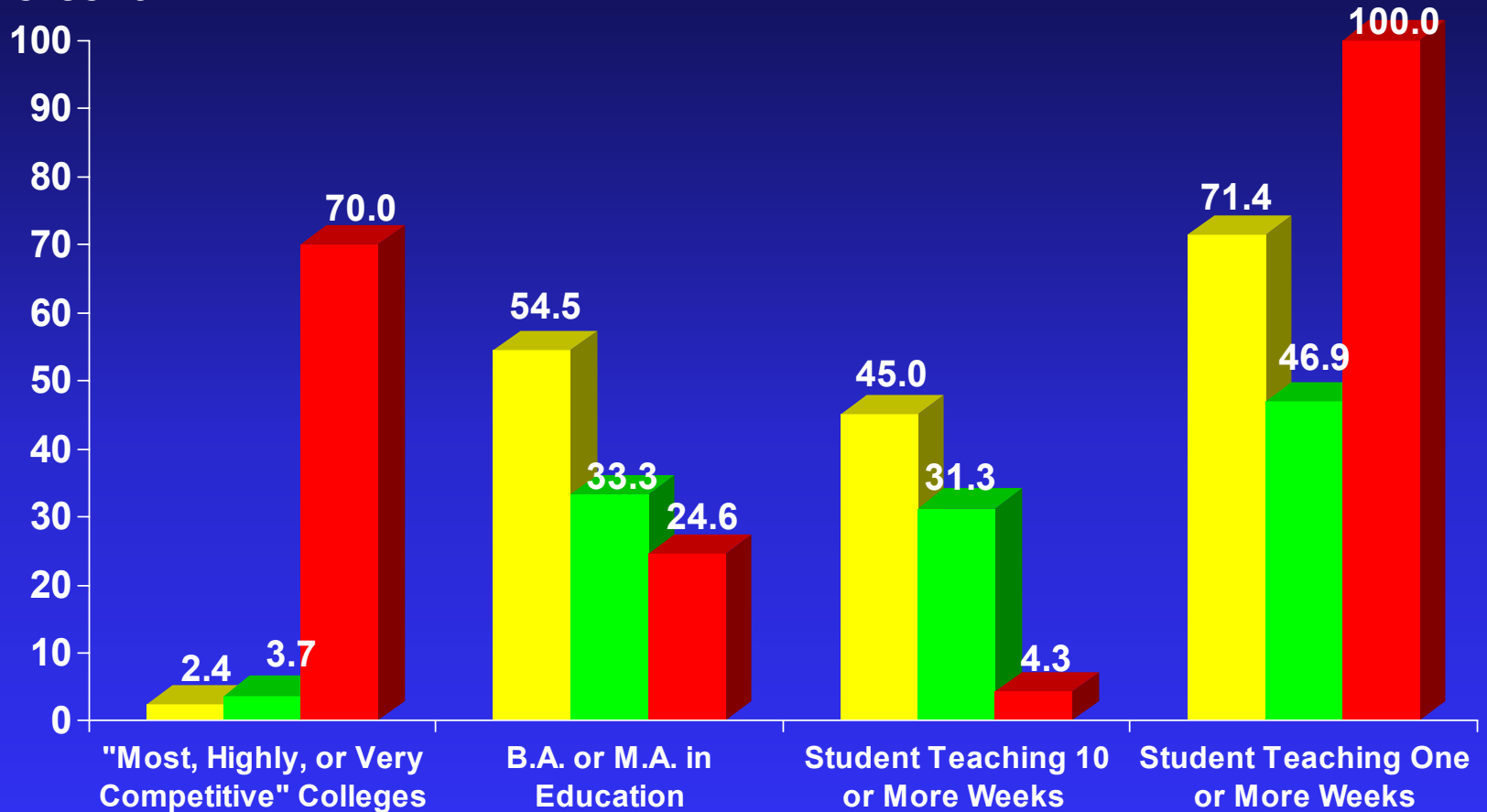
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# Teachers: Education

Percent



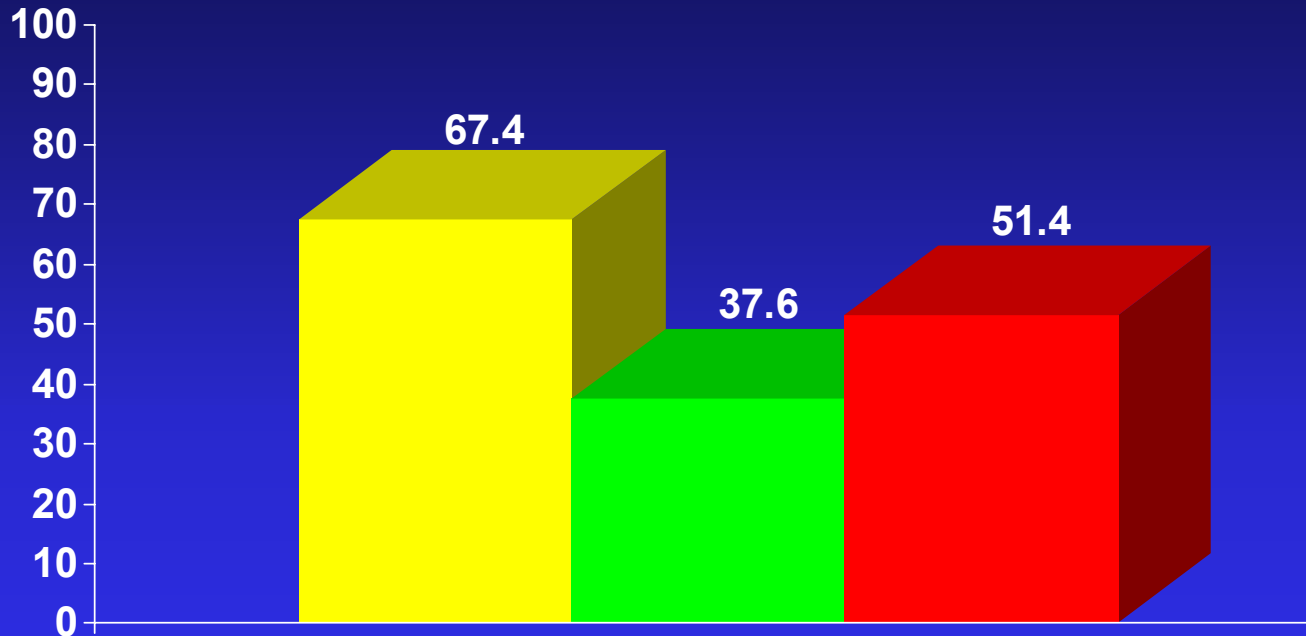
■ Controls

■ Novice Controls

■ TFA

# Teachers: Certification

Percent



Held Regular or Initial Teacher Certification

■ Controls

■ Novice Controls

■ TFA



# Findings: Student Outcomes

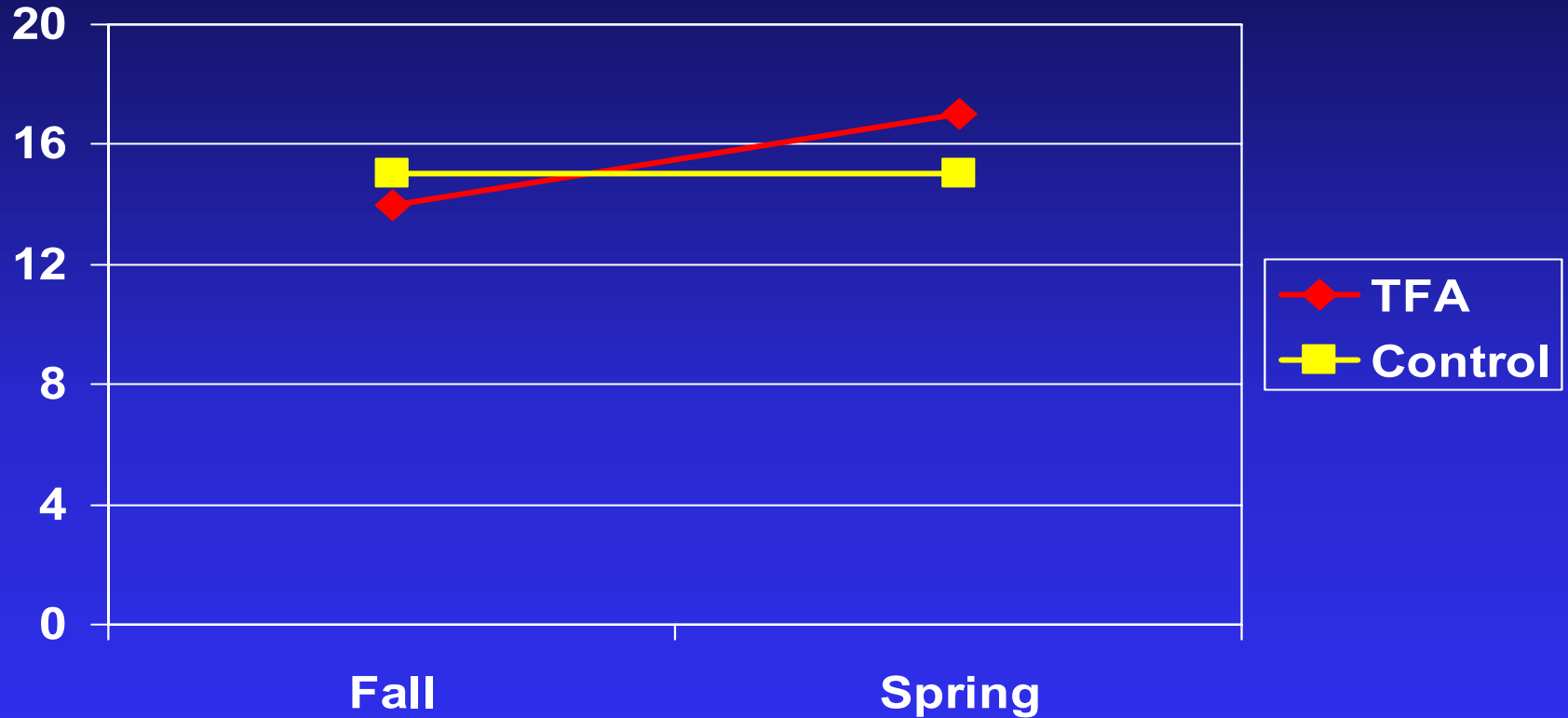
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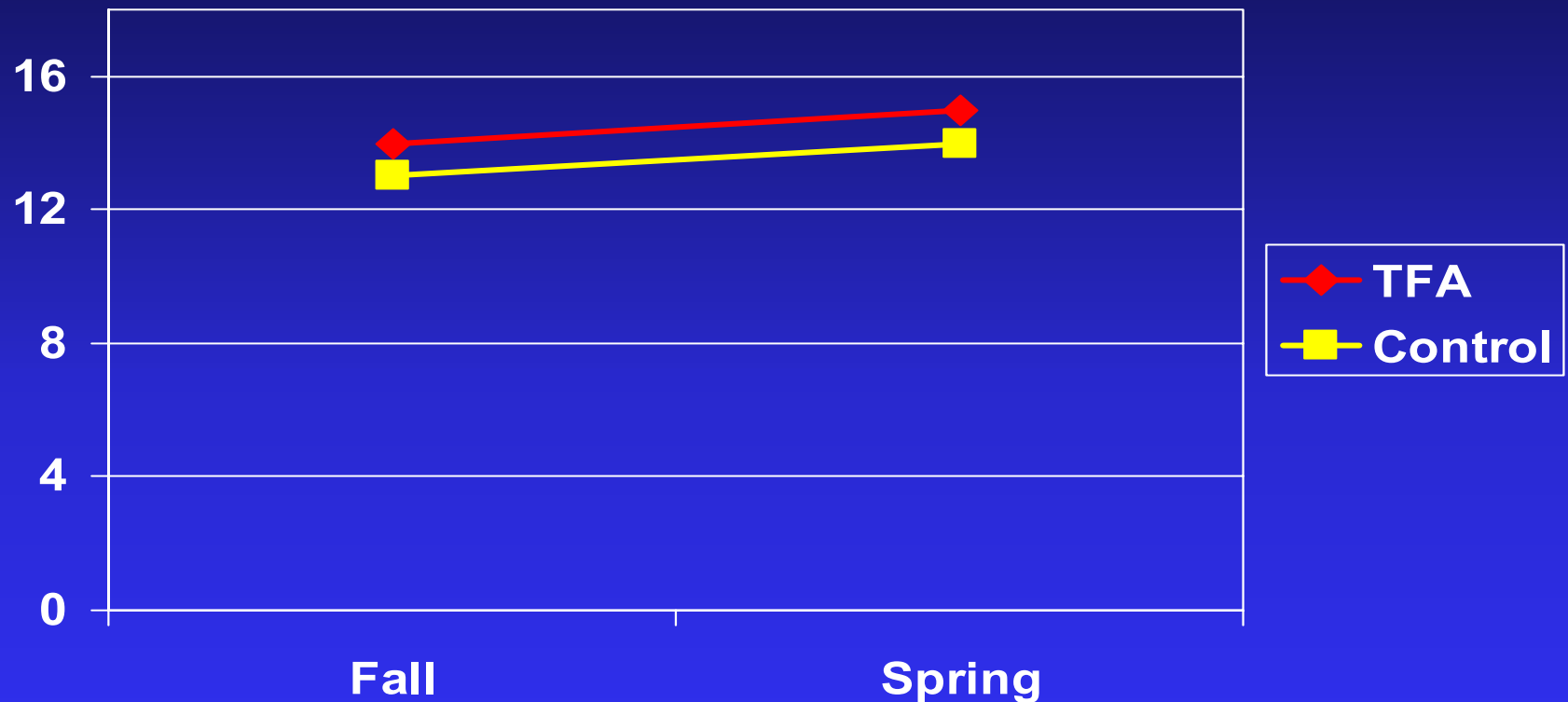
# TFA Teachers Generate Higher Math Scores

National Percentile



# TFA Teachers Generate Similar Reading Scores

National Percentile



# Similar Findings for Teacher Subgroups

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**TFA teachers generated higher math scores and similar reading scores when compared with:**

- **Novice teachers**
- **Veteran teachers**
- **Uncertified teachers**
- **Certified teachers**

# Impacts are Similar for Different Student Subgroups

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- Gender
- Race/ethnicity
- Initial achievement
- Grade
- Location
- Other

# No Impact on Other Academic Outcomes

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- **Grade promotion**
- **Summer school attendance**

# Attendance and Behavior

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- **Attendance/tardiness**
  - No impact
- **Disciplinary incidents**
  - No impact
- **Teacher-reported problems**
  - TFA reported more

# Conclusions: Who Teaches

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- **TFA teachers came from more competitive colleges, had less formal training**
- **Many control teachers had little formal training**



# Conclusions: Impact on Students

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- **Students of TFA teachers performed as well as or better on math and reading tests**
- **No impact on other student outcomes**
- **TFA teachers more likely to report problems in their classrooms**