

Evaluation of the Teach For America (TFA) Program

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Motivation for Studying TFA

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

Primary Research Question

Question:

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

Answer:

Yes

Experimental Design

- 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

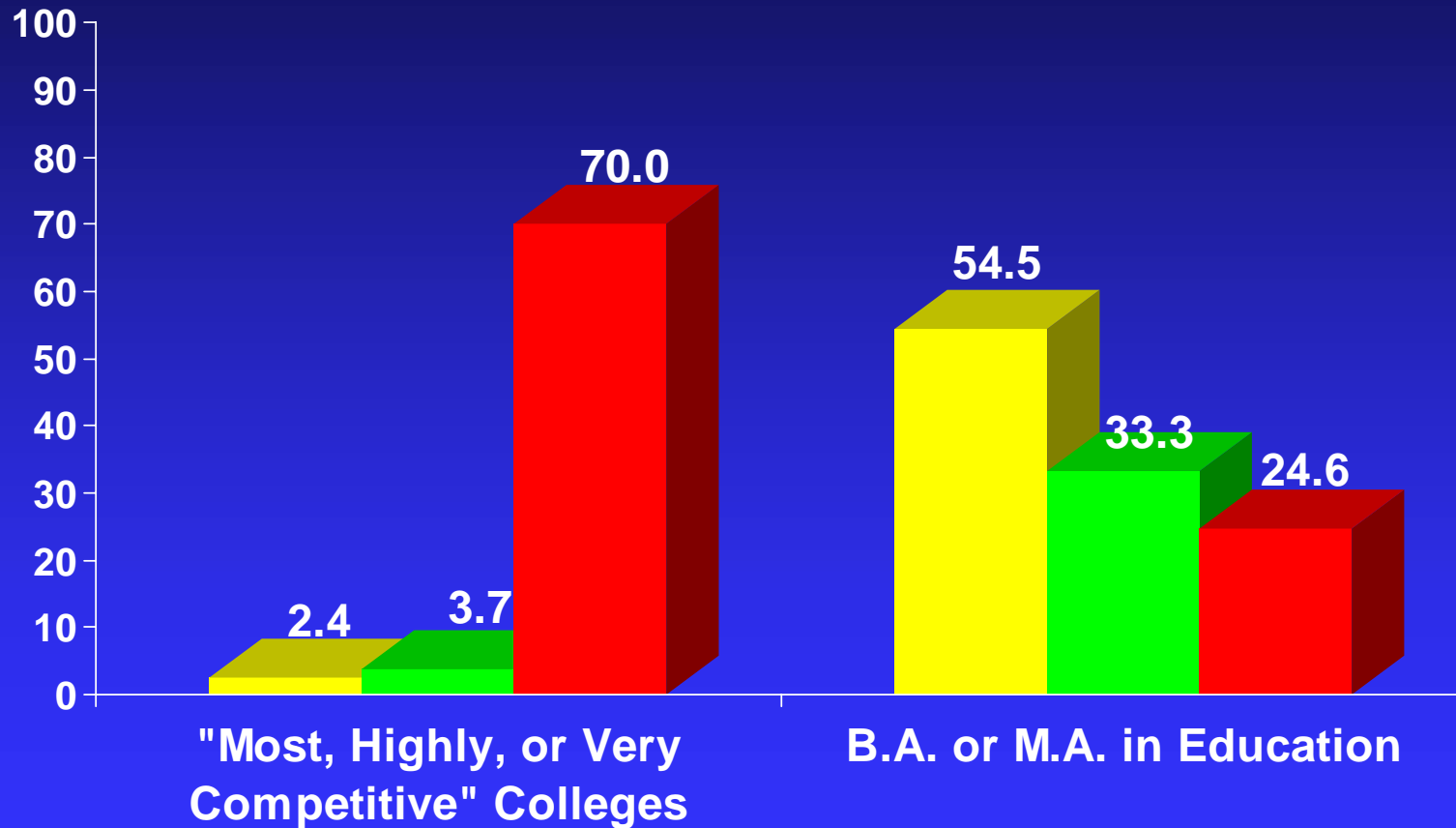
- **Poor students**
 - 95 percent free or reduced price lunch
- **Low academic achievers**
 - Score at 14th percentile in math, 13th in reading
 - 20 percent overage for grade
- **Minority students**
 - 67 percent African American
 - 26 percent Hispanic

Findings: Teacher Characteristics

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Teachers: Education

Percent

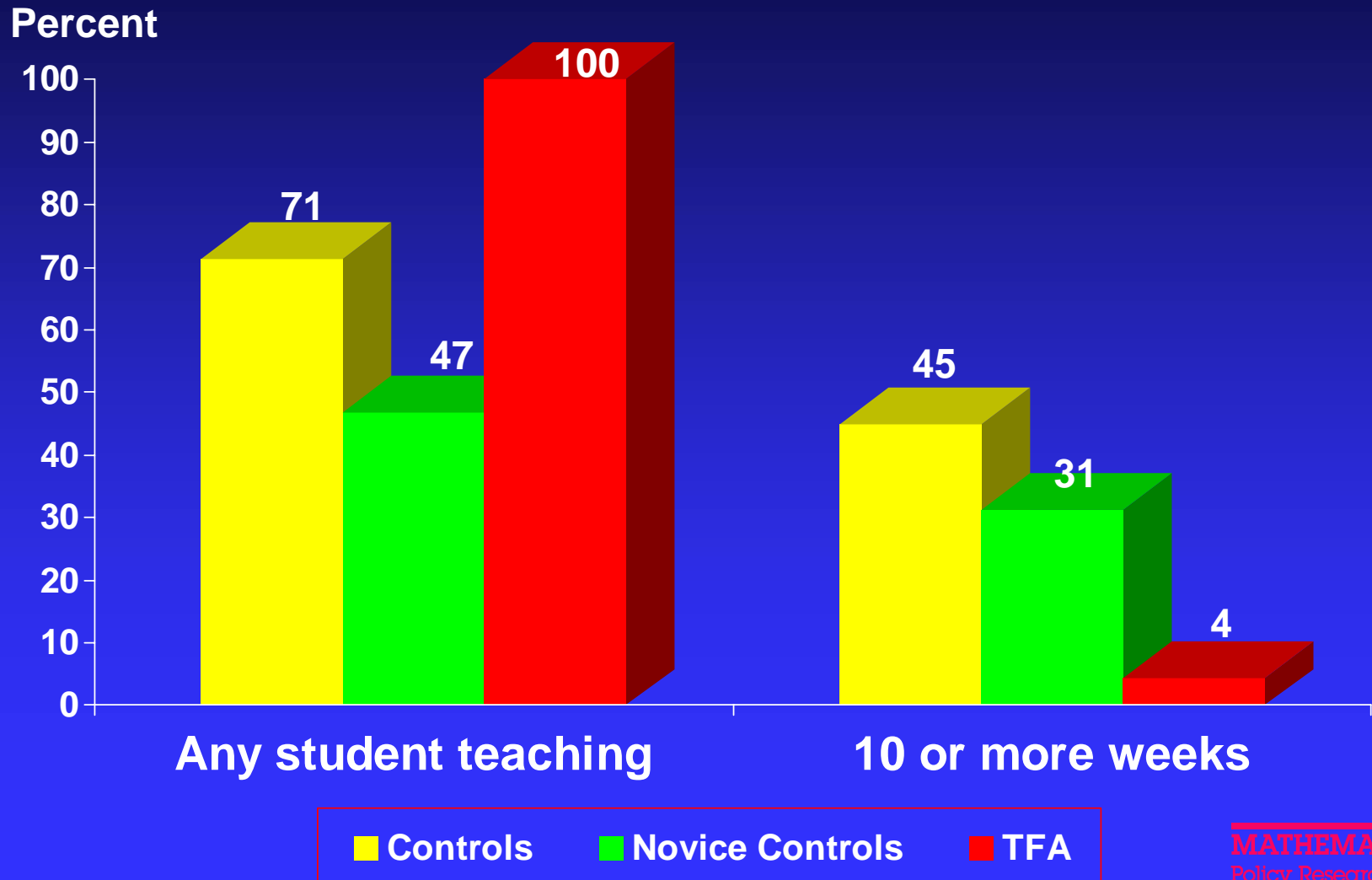


■ Controls

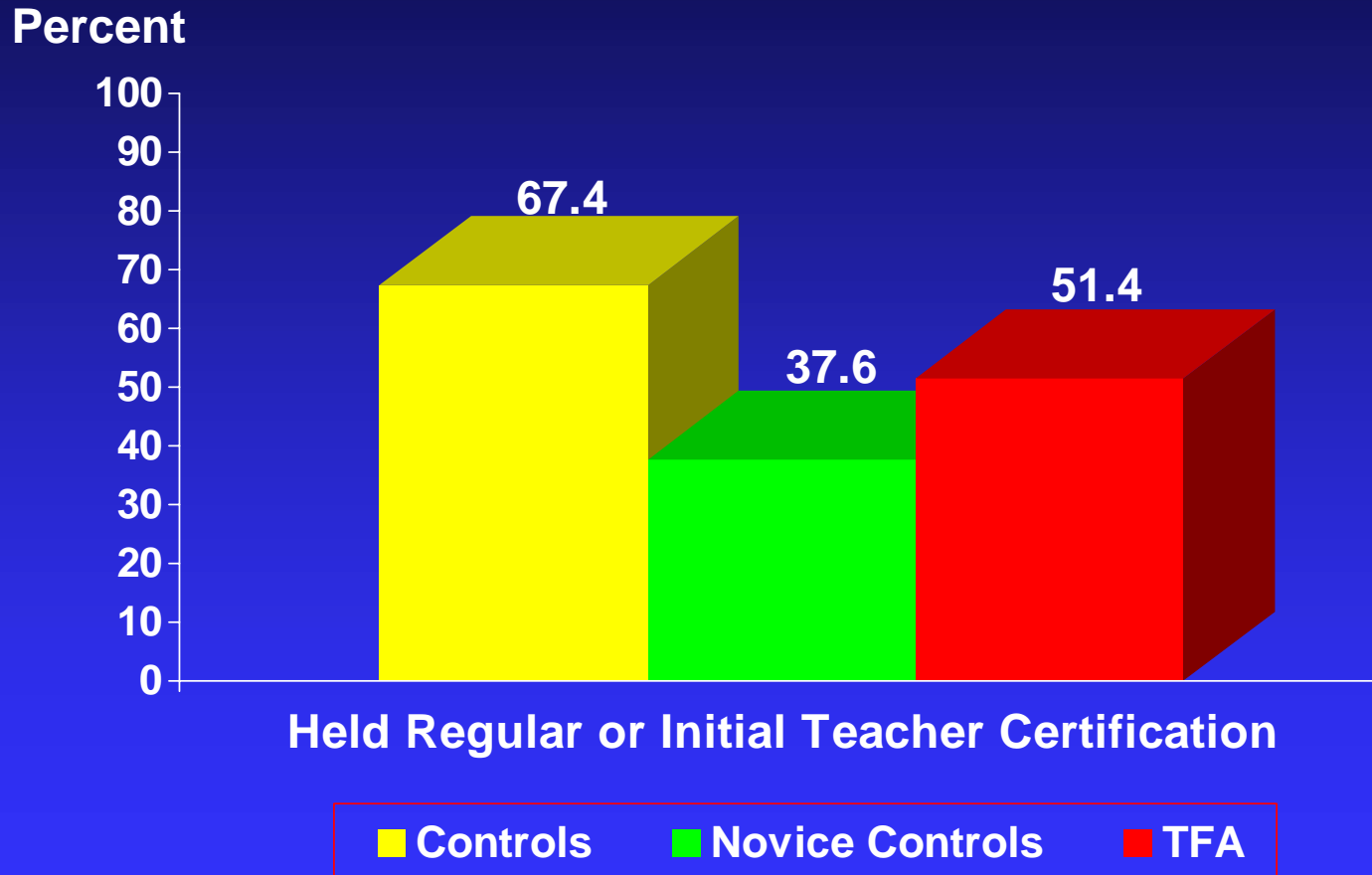
■ Novice Controls

■ TFA

Teachers: Student Teaching



Teachers: Certification

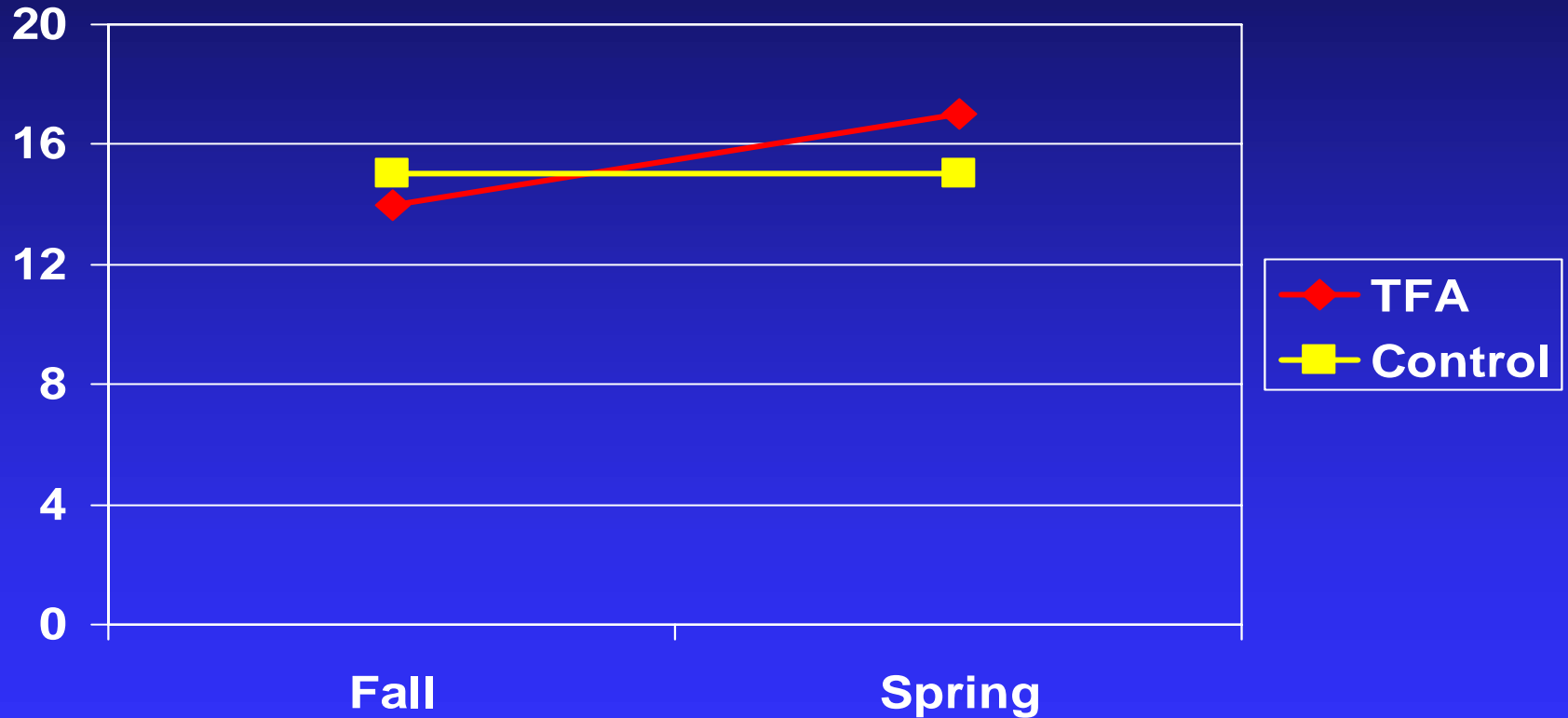


Findings: Student Outcomes

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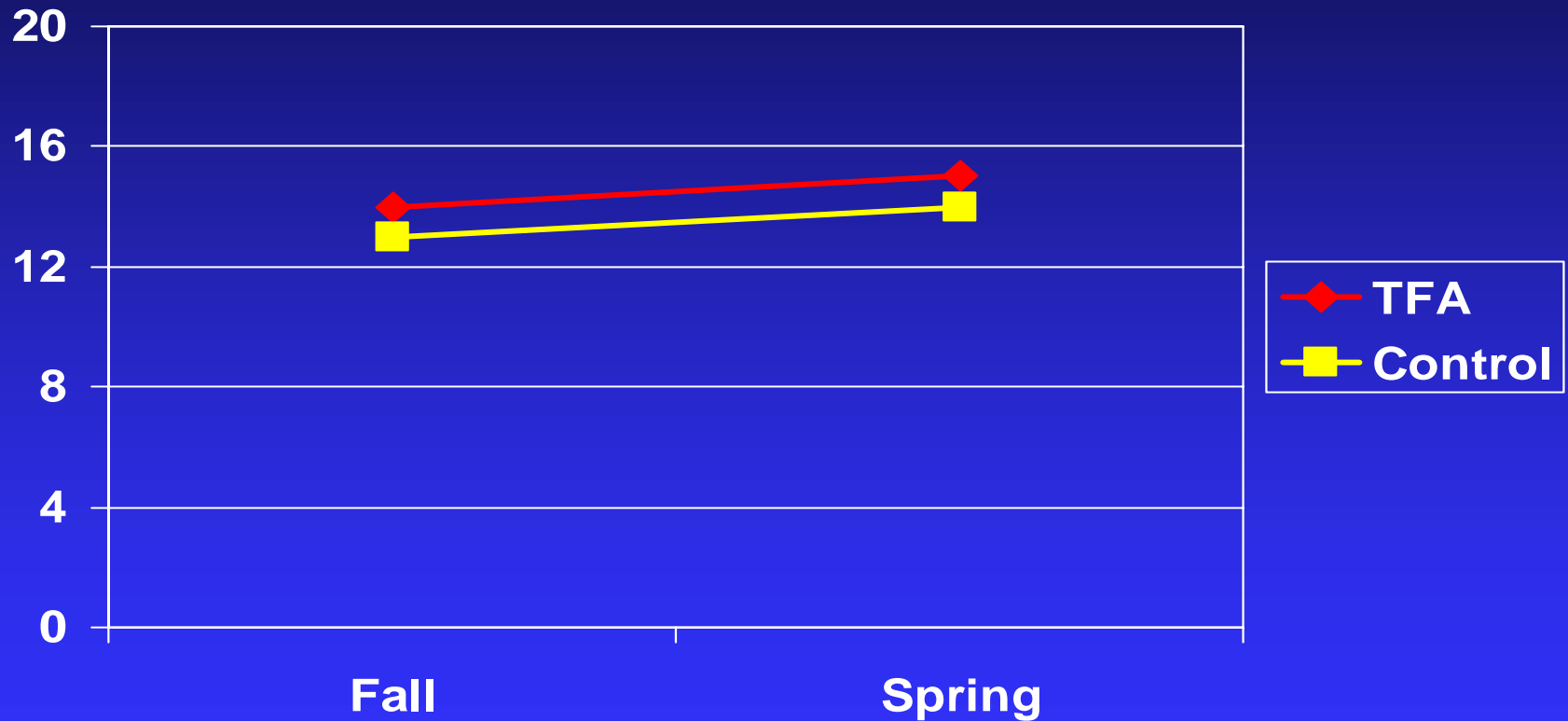
TFA Teachers Generate Higher Math Scores

National Percentile



TFA Teachers Generate Similar Reading Scores

National Percentile



Similar Findings for Teacher Subgroups

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

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

Other Outcomes

- **No impact on:**
 - **Grade promotion**
 - **Summer school attendance**
 - **Attendance/tardiness**
 - **Disciplinary incidents**
- **Teacher-reported problems**
 - **TFA teachers reported more**

Conclusions: Who Teaches

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

Conclusions: Impact on Students

- 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