Evaluation of Teach For America: Lessons from a Randomized Field Trial in Education

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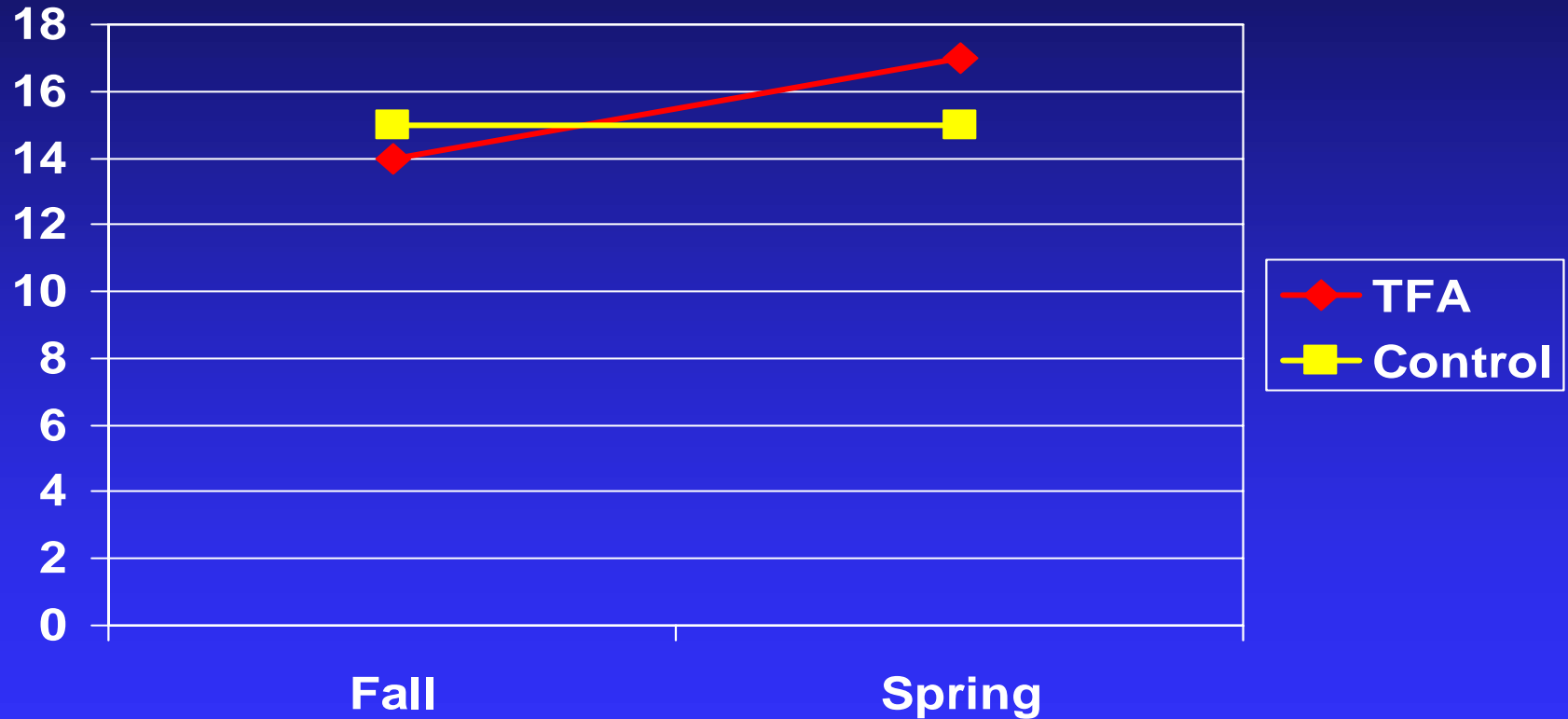
Motivation for Studying TFA

- **Unique approach to teacher recruitment/preparation**

- **Widespread criticism of approach**

- **Existing evidence is limited**

- **TFA is expanding rapidly**

- **Larger debate about alternative teacher routes**

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Design of Mathematica's Study

- **Measure the overall impact of TFA**

- **Compare achievement of elementary students taught by TFA and control teachers *at the same grades in the same schools***

- **National sample of TFA schools**

- **Randomly assign students to teachers— replicated "mini-experiments"**
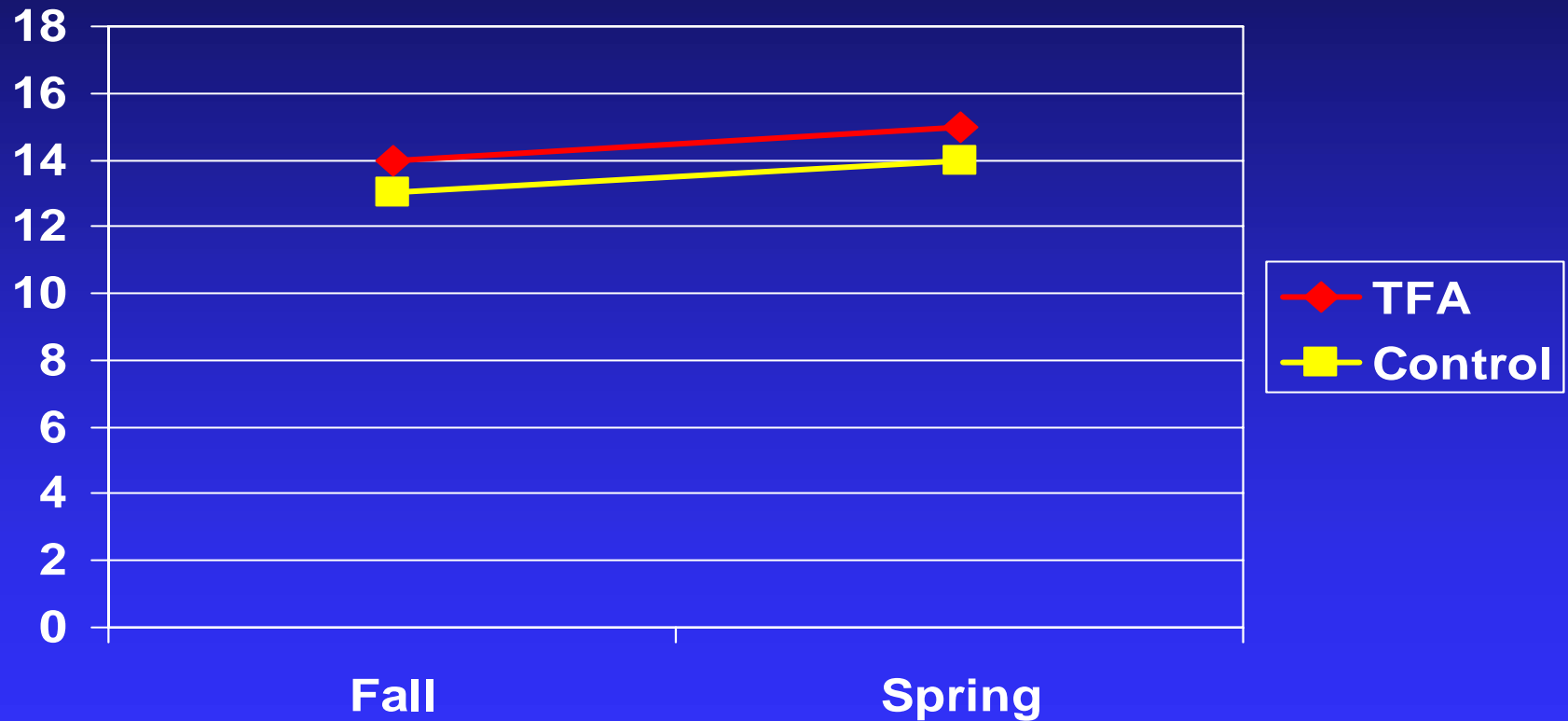
- **Focus primarily on standardized test scores**

Positive Impact on Math

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No Impact on Reading

Percentile

Chart showing reading percentile for TFA and Control groups from Fall to Spring. The y-axis ranges from 0 to 18. TFA (red) rises from about 14 in Fall to 15 in Spring. Control (yellow) rises from about 13 in Fall to 14 in Spring. X-axis labels: Fall, Spring. Legend: TFA, Control.

Teacher Subgroups: Same Story

- **Experience**
  - Novice, veteran controls
  - First-year TFAs, second-year TFAs

- **Certification**
  - Certified, non-certified controls

How Does the MPR Study Compare to Other TFA Evaluations?

- **Random assignment**

- **Within-school comparisons**

- **National**

- **Objectivity of the evaluator**

Other Impact Studies

- **CREDO (Raymond, Fletcher, and Luque 2001)**
  - **Houston**

- **ASU (Lazcko-Kerr and Berliner 2002)**
  - **One district in Arizona**

What Effect Did the MPR Study Have on Policy?

- **Changed the nature of the TFA debate**

- **Influenced TFA program's self improvement**

- **District partners and funders?**

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What Counts as Evidence?

- **Internal validity**
  - **Randomized design**
  - **Quasi-experimental design**

- **External validity**
  - **Replication in many areas, typical areas and conditions**

- **Face validity, credibility**
  - **Large sample size**
  - **Peer review**
  - **Objectivity of the researcher**
  - **Stakeholder buy-in**