

# Teachers Teaching Teachers:

**Transforming professional development by  
empowering and investing in educators**

# INTRODUCTION .....

As teachers, we have found that school funding, teacher quality, and teacher accountability have become highly charged issues in Indiana. One way in which all three are connected is through teacher professional development (PD). All districts in Indianapolis budget and spend significant funds each year for teacher training to improve the quality of instruction that teachers provide to students. Teachers spend countless hours in workshops, professional learning communities, and after-school working groups to hone their craft.

But is professional development working? Are teachers satisfied? How is PD structured across the different schools and districts in Indianapolis? How effectively are funds being used? Do teachers see a difference in their own effectiveness as a direct result of school- or district-led PD? What are the most valuable sources of professional development?

Recently, several members of Teach Plus-Indianapolis Teaching Policy Fellows, a cohort of early-career educators teaching in low-income district and charter schools throughout the city, began wrestling with these questions following discussion about our own diverse experiences with PD. We agreed that with time and money in short supply for schools and educators, it's important that we make the most of professional development experiences. We decided to ask teachers across the city to report on and evaluate their PD experiences. An electronic survey was sent out to educators currently teaching in district and charter schools in Indianapolis (including Takeover schools). The survey asked teachers about their general satisfaction, composition of, and suggestions for professional development. We received 319 responses. Based on what we heard from Indianapolis teachers, this report aims to examine the following:

- 1. What's the investment?** How much money is being spent on teacher PD in Indianapolis? How do our city's schools and districts compare to one another on their PD expenditures?
- 2. How does it work?** What does PD look like now? What kinds of PD are most and least valuable? What's working, and what isn't?
- 3. What can we do better?** If teachers were in charge of PD, what changes would they make? Based on what we heard from teachers, what changes could be made and new partnerships forged to improve the return on schools' and districts' PD investments?

## WHAT'S THE INVESTMENT: WHO SPENDS THE MOST AND LEAST ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

The logic behind investing in professional development for teachers is clear: improved teacher performance will lead to improved student achievement. In 2013-2014, the public schools in Marion County spent over \$11.2 million on Instructional Staff Training Services according to the Indiana Department of Education.<sup>1</sup>

The investment varied greatly, however, when considered on a per-teacher basis. On average, school districts and/or independent charters spent \$1,158 per teacher. Figure 1 represents the PD costs per teacher for public schools and districts in Marion County.

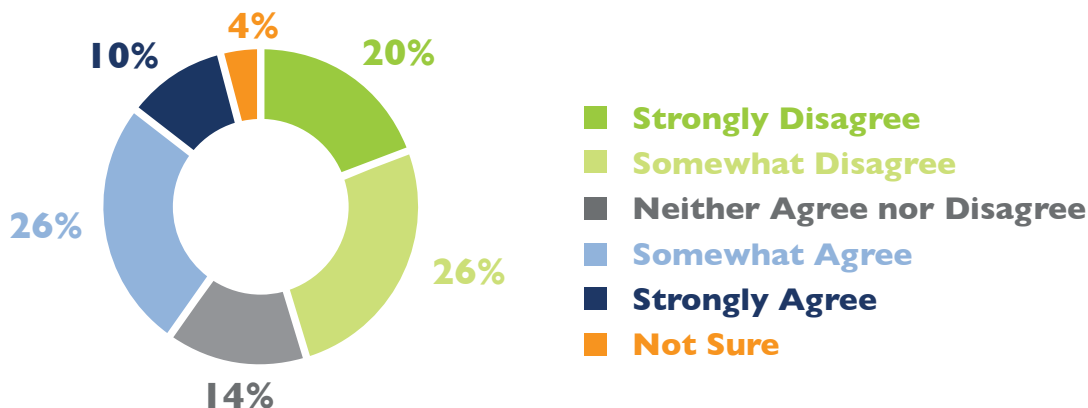
**Figure 1: Highest and Lowest PD Cost Per Teacher in Marion County**

School Corp/ Charter	PD \$	Teachers	\$ / Teacher
Indy Lighthouse Charter School	391,489	58	6,750
Andrew Academy	60,013	19	3,159
Indianapolis Public Schools	7,274,326	2,579	2,821
University Heights Preparatory Acad	80,021	30	2,667
Nexus Academy of Indianapolis	38,734	15	2,582
Christel House - All Campuses	96,949	42	2,308
Tindley - All Campuses	198,525	104	1,909
Avondale Meadows Academy	72,598	39	1,861
Imagine Life Sciences Acad - West	81,465	44	1,851
Padua Academy	36,542	21	1,740
The Excel Center-Lafayette Square	28,162	17	1,657
Hoosier Acad Virtual Charter	129,782	81	1,602
Phalen Ldrshp Acad	22,063	14	1,576
KIPP Indpls College Preparatory	42,452	27	1,572
INDIANAPOLIS AVERAGE	11,284,591	9,745	1,158
IMSA - All Campuses	119,142	108	1,103
MSD Warren Township	609,871	756	807
MSD Wayne Township	860,124	1,070	804
Irvington Community School	40,746	63	647
Paramount School of Excellence Inc.	21,716	34	639
Hope Academy	5,107	8	638
Indianapolis Metropolitan High Sch	20,218	34	595
MSD Pike Township	358,632	716	501
Andrew J Brown	19,691	43	458
Fall Creek Academy	19,901	46	433

Franklin Township Com Sch Corp	163,668	508	322
MSD Decatur Township	112,991	373	303
MSD Lawrence Township	263,181	932	282
Excel Center for Adult Learners	14,816	61	243
SE Neighborhood Sch of Excellence	6,242	36	173
Herron Charter	11,190	67	167
School Town of Speedway	11,164	131	85
Carpe Diem - Meridian Campus	359	5	72
Flanner House Elementary School	1,111	17	65
MSD Washington Township	46,673	742	63
Perry Township Schools	21,110	909	23

There is a wide range of investments made by different districts and charter schools representing many distinct strategies. Do teachers believe these investments are well spent? As reflected in Figure 2, teachers surveyed for this project were split on whether their schools and districts made wise investments with the professional development dollars.

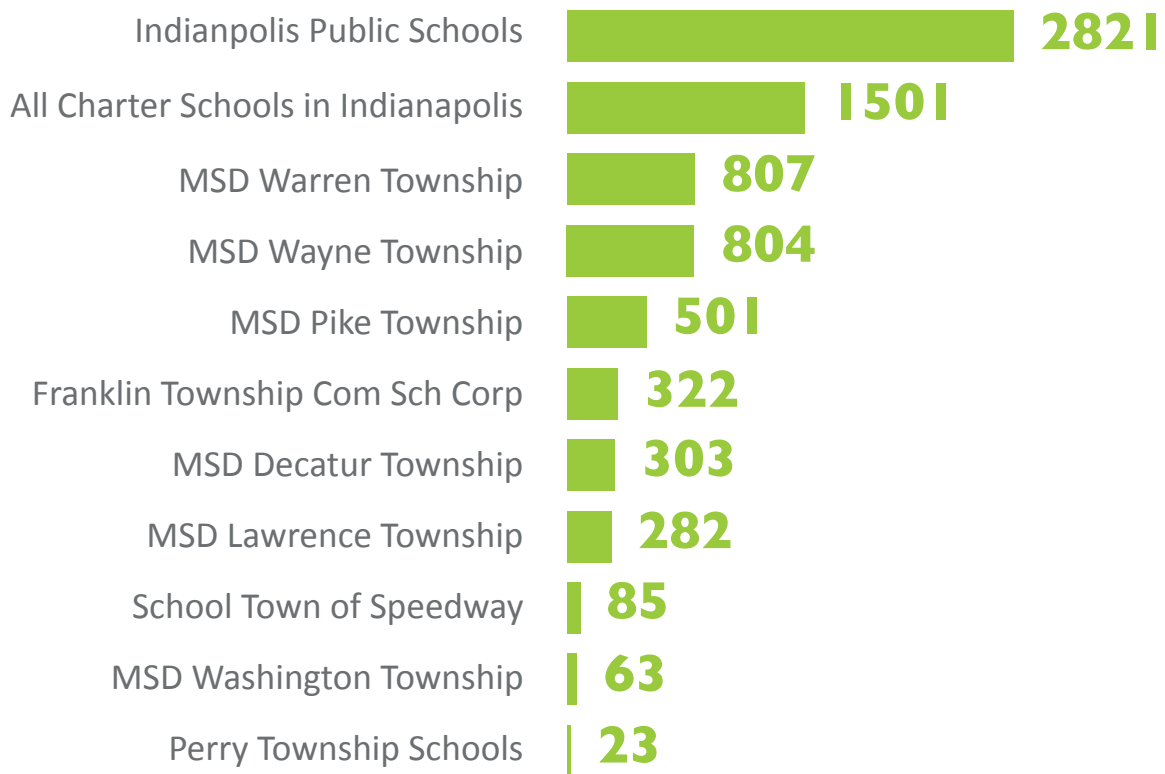
**Figure 2: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: My school and district spend professional development dollars in a useful way.**



Because we aim to make recommendations for improving professional development across all of Indianapolis, we were also curious whether the number of teachers in a school or district influenced the costs associated with PD. One may assume that a larger district would experience greater economies of scale, which would enable it to lower the per-teacher cost of professional development. Under this assumption, the per-teacher cost of PD for charter schools would likely be higher than average, because each independent charter school would need to provide PD that meets the various needs of its teaching population.

With the exception of Indianapolis Public Schools, this is reflected in the data we collected from the Department of Education. On average, charter schools spent nearly twice as much per teacher on professional development as Warren Township and almost three times as much per teacher as Pike Township (see Figure 3). Again, this is not particularly surprising when one considers the unique and varied development needs that may exist within one charter school.

**Figure 3: PD Cost Per Teacher in Public School Districts in Marion County**



All of this financial information indicates that there is a wide variety of professional development strategies taking place throughout Indianapolis district and charter schools.

In our survey, we asked Indianapolis teachers how they feel about their schools' and districts' investments in professional development opportunities currently and how such investments might be improved.

**What We Took Away From the Survey:**

- The money spent per teacher on professional development varies widely among districts and charters in Indianapolis.
- Teachers' opinions are mixed on whether the investment in professional development is being well spent in their schools or districts.
- Most districts appear to experience some economies of scale over their charter partners when it comes to investing in professional development.

### What We Are Left Wondering:

- Given that there are shared standards across all schools in Indianapolis, is there a way to pool investments to provide better opportunities for all teachers?
- Can districts build better metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of their investments in professional development?

## HOW DOES IT WORK: WHAT DOES PD LOOK LIKE NOW AND HOW SATISFIED ARE THE TEACHERS?

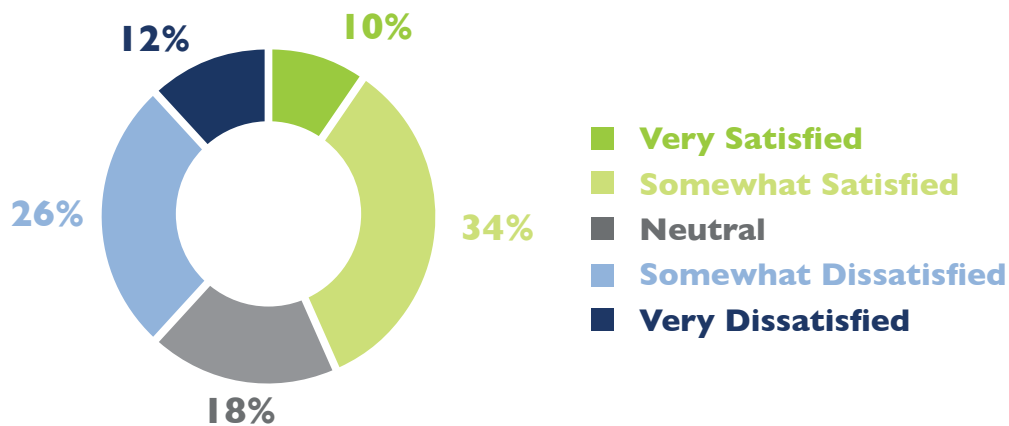
Recognizing that schools and districts across Indianapolis are making a significant investment in professional development, we aimed to determine teachers’ current satisfaction with PD, how it is chosen, and which opportunities are the most valuable to teachers. Having this information would allow us to make recommendations for improving professional development for all teachers.

### Satisfaction and Teacher Improvement

We first gauged teacher satisfaction with professional development overall, as well as teacher perspectives on whether PD was improving their performance. Less than half of the teachers (44 percent) surveyed were very or somewhat satisfied with the professional development currently offered by their school or district (Figure 4).

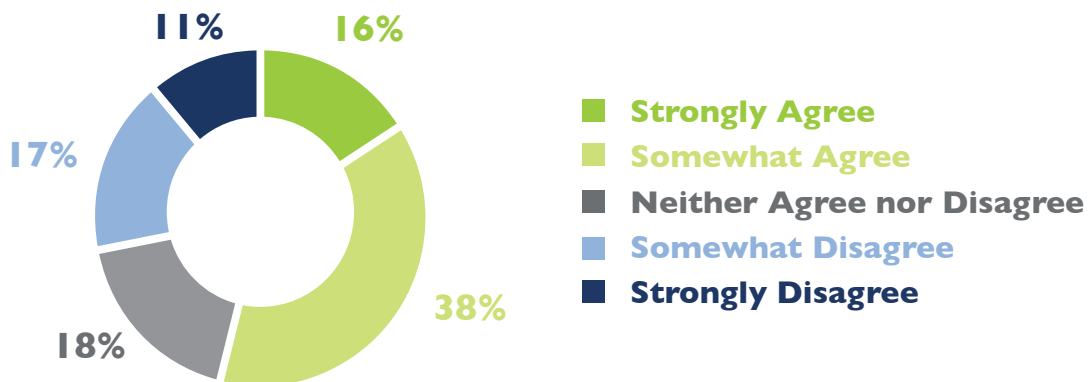
**Figure 4: Current Professional Development Satisfaction**

**How satisfied are you with your current professional development offered by your school and/or district?**



Perhaps more alarmingly, just over half of the teachers (54 percent) agreed that their current professional development improved their performance, with nearly half of teachers feeling that there was little to no return on investment (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: My Professional Development improves my performance**



This frustration was captured in the individual responses of some survey respondents. One teacher said: “I have not enjoyed or thought any of our PD days beneficial. I always leave feeling 10 more steps behind and with so much more to do. I would love it if we could tie in some of our strengths and weaknesses identified in my evaluation. I think it would be very beneficial to all teachers if we could make choices about what sessions to attend so we can learn from each other and bounce back ideas.”

**Choice and Alignment to Growth**

Given that less than half of the teachers surveyed were satisfied with their current professional development, we asked follow-up questions about how PD is chosen and whether it is tailored to the needs of teachers (Figure 6). About half of the teachers surveyed (49 percent) had the opportunity to make choices about their professional development, while just 31 percent agreed that the professional development they received was tailored to the areas in which they needed the most growth.

**Figure 6:**

Question	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I have the opportunity to make choices about my professional development	12%	37%	12%	24%	15%
My professional development is tailored to the areas in which I need the most growth	7%	24%	14%	31%	24%

## The Impact of Choice and Alignment on Satisfaction

One particularly interesting way to look at the data collected from teachers is to examine the relationship between teacher satisfaction and their opportunity to make choices about PD, as well as the relationship between teacher satisfaction and the alignment of PD to areas of growth. Are teachers who are able to choose their professional development also more satisfied? If professional development is tailored to areas of growth, are teachers more satisfied? The answer to both of these questions, according to the data from our survey, is yes. Teachers who are able to choose their PD are more satisfied, and teachers who receive PD aligned to the areas in which they need to grow are also more satisfied (Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Teacher Satisfaction with PD Choice and Alignment to Growth Areas**

### Among satisfied teachers...



## Most Valuable Sources of PD

Throughout teachers’ careers, professional development comes from various individuals and organizations. Districts and schools often employ school-based coaches or external partners to provide PD to teachers, as well as supplement that PD with school-based principals and district academic leaders. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) may be led by any of these groups or by teachers themselves. Which of these is most valuable to teachers? This consideration may help us determine how to improve professional development for all teachers.

The vast majority (86.9 percent) of the teachers surveyed found the PD provided by peer teachers to be valuable (Figure 8). According to surveyed teachers, the value of peer-led professional development far surpassed any of the alternative options. On the other end of the spectrum, fewer than one-third of the teachers (32.7 percent) felt that professional development from their district or charter management organization was valuable.

**Figure 8: Value of Various Professional Development Sources**

PD Source	% of Teachers Who Said Source Was Very or Somewhat Valuable	% of Teachers Who Said Source Was Not At All or Somewhat Not Valuable
Teacher Peers	86.9%	7.6%
School Instructional Coach	56.7%	28.9%



Principal	52.3%	17.6%
External Consultant/Partner	33.2%	26.7%
District or Charter Management Org	32.7%	27.3%

While the teachers we surveyed overwhelmingly valued teacher-led professional development, there were mixed reviews about some of the less popular sources. This seems to support the concept of giving teachers opportunities to make choices about their PD – both in content and in source. District and school leaders should approach professional development in the same manner by offering choices from several different sources.

The wide variety of needs and experiences was evident in the open survey responses. One teacher emphasized the importance of teacher-led professional development, saying: “Teachers’ voices need to be heard and teachers need to be teaching teachers. It’s not helpful to bring someone in from outside our school or district who knows nothing about our school.”

On the other hand, several open responses point to a need for outside consultants for special area classes. One teacher says: “So much of professional development is geared to the classroom teacher. The most valuable PD has been outside of my district in the music workshops that I’ve attended.” Special area teachers and special population teachers have limited access to trainings and even collaboration with peers that are specific to what they teach. This is why choice and alignment to areas of growth are so important.

### **What We Took Away From the Survey:**

- Less than half of teachers are satisfied with professional development currently, and many do not believe it improves their performance.
- Teachers are more likely to be satisfied with professional development if they are allowed to make choices about what PD they attend and if that PD is aligned to areas in which they need to improve.
- Teachers want to learn from other teachers. The vast majority of teachers identify their peers as a valuable source of professional development.

### **What We Are Left Wondering:**

- How can districts give teachers more opportunities to make choices about their professional development while also aligning it to the areas in which they need to grow?
- Given the level of investment in professional development city-wide, how can more resources be driven to elevating opportunities for teacher-led professional development?

## **WHAT CAN WE DO BETTER: WHAT WOULD TEACHERS DO TO IMPROVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT?**

Through our project, we identified four key questions to ask when looking to improve professional development in Indianapolis:

1. Given that there are shared standards across all schools in Indianapolis, is there a way to pool investments to provide better PD opportunities for all teachers?
2. Can districts build better metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of their investments in professional development?
3. How can districts give teachers more opportunities to make choices about their professional development while also aligning it to the areas in which they need to grow?
4. Given the level of investment in PD city-wide, how can more resources be driven to elevating opportunities for teacher-led professional development?

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CITY-WIDE STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

We address our key questions by offering three recommendations to broadly impact professional development across Indianapolis.

### **I. Create an ongoing, teacher-led professional development opportunity that unites teachers from across the city.**

- **Why?**

1. Teachers value PD led by other teachers.
2. Public schools across the city and state share the same standards and can learn from one another.
3. Districts often experience economies of scale by providing PD to more teachers than their charter peers, so an overall cost-savings could be realized while still meeting the needs of all teachers.
4. Teachers of special populations in individual charter schools will have access to the knowledge of peers across the city.

- **What does it look like?**

An Indianapolis district or charter authorizer could provide opportunities for teachers to create professional development modules for their grade and/or content area and share them with colleagues across the city. It could be an annual workshop or a more regularly-held small-group collaboration.

### **2. Reinvest current professional development dollars in teacher-led professional development.**

- **Why?**

1. There is an enormous disparity in the investments being made in professional development by different districts and schools.
2. More than half of the teachers surveyed are not currently satisfied with their PD.
3. Teachers value teacher-led PD.

4. As addressed in previous Teach Plus briefs<sup>2</sup>, teachers desire career ladders and leadership opportunities tied to making additional income.

- **What does it look like?**

By creating opportunities for teachers to lead and be compensated for professional development, the teachers who receive the PD will be more satisfied and the investment will help serve as a retention strategy for a school's strongest teachers. This could be done on a small scale by beginning to compensate teachers who lead Professional Learning Communities in their buildings, and it could be built out to include stipends for teachers facilitating at city-wide PD conferences.

### **3. Build mechanisms to gauge both teacher satisfaction and teacher improvement as a result of professional development.**

- **Why?**

1. More than half of the teachers surveyed are not currently satisfied with their PD.
2. Just over half of teachers believe PD improves their performance.
3. Teachers are more satisfied when PD is aligned to their areas of growth.
4. Teachers are more satisfied when they are given the opportunity to choose PD.

- **What does it look like?**

If teachers are being held accountable for student outcomes, districts and/or charters should be held responsible for the professional development opportunities they provide. Professional development should be linked to student outcomes whenever possible, and teacher satisfaction should be measured and addressed.

## **NEAR-TERM STRATEGIES**

In addition to making recommendations based on the four key questions, we wanted to vet potential short-term strategies with the teachers we surveyed. We asked teachers whether they would support or oppose strategies for changing professional development, and we have incorporated this feedback into our recommendations (Figure 9). These solutions are opportunities for individual schools or districts to implement

changes to professional development in the near term, therefore improving teacher satisfaction and the overall impact of PD.

**Figure 9: Teacher Support of Short-Term PD Changes**

Model/Concept	% of Teachers Who Strongly or Somewhat Support
Host a PD Day set aside for teacher-led PD sessions where teachers can make choices about what session to attend while learning from their peers	95%
Provide additional compensation to teachers for providing professional development to their peers	93%
Tie some or all of PD directly to strengths and weaknesses identified in a teacher’s evaluation	86%
Provide PD through an online format	78%

## CONCLUSION.....

Professional development is an important and substantial part of every teacher’s career. There is a tremendous opportunity to improve professional development in Indianapolis. By creating opportunities for teacher-led PD, making smarter investments in PD, and creating mechanisms for evaluating the effectiveness of PD, schools and districts across Indianapolis could improve teacher satisfaction and student outcomes.

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**A spotlight on charter schools: How does school type impact teachers’ opinions about professional development?**

As Teach Plus Teaching Policy Fellows, we have the opportunity to interact with and learn from peer teachers who work in school types different from our own. Our working group is made up of teachers from charters, townships, and IPS, and we have shared our own anecdotes related to professional development with one another. We were curious if working in a charter school changed professional development experiences versus working for a school within a larger district, and we were able to glean some differences from our survey.

Charter school teachers share some similar attitudes toward professional development as their colleagues in public districts. They value peer and administration-led professional development over professional development run by external sources or charter management groups. Charter school teachers, much like their public district peers, desire choice in deciding which types of professional

development opportunities they attend. They would be open to attend PD sessions online as well as to attend collaborative professional development with teachers from other districts. Finally, charter school teachers also believe that teachers who lead professional development should be compensated for their contributions.

While charter and public school teachers have similar attitudes towards the structure and roles of professional development in their buildings, the survey suggests that charter school teachers are more satisfied with their professional development. They reported higher rates of satisfaction with their current professional development, as well as indicated that their current professional development improves their teaching performance (See Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Charter Teacher vs. Non-charter Teacher Responses**

QUESTION	Charter Teachers	Non-Charter Teachers
I am currently satisfied by the PD offered by my school and/or district.	52%	41%
My professional development improves my performance	67%	50%
My school and district spend professional development dollars in a useful way	45%	33%
I am prepared to differentiate instruction for special populations of students, such as special education, ELL, and/or high ability/gifted students.	58%	67%
I am confident in my ability to meet the accommodations of all my students.	62%	70%

The size and structure of charter schools may account for these differences of opinions. Charter schools are typically smaller than their district counterparts, with both fewer students and staff. Individual charter schools also have more flexibility in creating professional development for their staff than larger school districts, which must schedule and manage trainings for a large number of schools. Charter schools can tailor their professional developments based on the needs of the staff – and students – in the building. One charter school teacher suggested that there “can be no silver bullet for professional development for all school because all teachers do not need the same development and different student populations have different needs.” For this teacher, using “observation data to drive our PD and produce work and conversation directly applicable to our lessons” provides the foundation for meaningful professional development.

Smaller networks, schools, and staff sizes may offer more opportunities for building specific professional development, but it also means that the pool of resources – and expertise – is significantly smaller. Overall, charter school teachers reported less confidence in meeting the needs of special populations of students, as well as differentiating instruction for these populations. One charter school teacher noted that the limited “depth of knowledge” within the building diminishes the impact of professional development. For this teacher, the “hiring choices/processes” fail to “provide me with the appropriate PD in house.”

### **A spotlight on special populations: One teacher’s perspective**

As Teach Plus Teaching Policy Fellows, we felt that it was important to address the needs of teachers of special populations when making recommendations for improved professional development. Most teachers in Indianapolis teach special populations of students, including special education, English Language Learners, high-ability, and high-poverty children. While over half of the teachers surveyed are confident in their ability to meet the needs of students, 71.2% of teachers would like to have more PD focused on addressing the needs of special populations.

One particular area that may address this gap is professional development on how to effectively co-teach in inclusion classrooms. Of the teachers surveyed who work in inclusion classrooms, 56.7% had never received professional development on effective co-teaching to meet the needs of all students. Because Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) often include a co-teaching model, this is an area that desperately needs to be addressed.

As an English Language teacher, I have witnessed the power of co-teaching in my own classroom, and I believe it is fundamental to helping all students succeed.

I was never really prepared to co-teach, but I jumped into a teaching situation where the only way to reach my students was to learn. I had to establish a relationship with my co-teachers and then build on their language acquisition stamina, which was often limited due to a lack of experience working with EL teachers. They were used to serving as the “lead” teacher and having inclusion teachers just assist where needed.

My co-teachers and I first established a relationship and then looked at our class as a whole, regardless of labels. Our focus when co-teaching is on every single one of “our” students. It took me awhile to accept that “my” students weren’t mine anymore, but as soon as I accepted they were “ours” we were able to begin collaborating. In our collaboration we keep in mind students’ strengths and weakness and differentiated instruction based on their needs.

My first year teaching would have been more effective if my teachers and I were prepared for co-teaching. I’m a teacher who wants to be a team player and get my hands dirty. With the co-teaching model we’re able to share responsibilities, but it took us figuring it out on our own without any coaching or development to become successful. Co-teaching is co-planning, collaboration, and co-

assessing to share responsibilities of a classroom. One of my co-teachers explains it as, “Co-teaching allows two professionals to plan, interact, and instruct together; giving the students a wealth of pedagogy and content knowledge. This interaction not only helps students, but helps teachers become better instructionally.”

That teacher and I have been able to collaborate on amazing units. We’ve created Donor’s Choose requests for literature like, “Witches: The Absolutely True Tale of Disaster in Salem” and have paired this text with fiction excerpts to compare and contrast how author’s use or alter historical events. We also integrated it for argumentative writing.

All of this we’ve been able to create and implement through co-teaching in a predominantly EL classroom. We continue to learn about co-teaching through literature and teamwork as professional development on this style of teaching also lacks within our district. All teachers — both general education and special populations — deserve opportunities to hone this skill, because it is absolutely fundamental to our students’ success.

## END NOTES.....

<sup>i</sup> This information comes from a public records request from the Indiana Department of Education. Teach Plus requested the expenditures from account 22130 for all public schools in Marion County. Account 22130 is described as “Instructional Staff Training Service. Activities associated with the professional development and training of instructional personnel. These include such activities as in-service training (including mentor teachers workshops, conferences, demonstrations, and other activities related to the ongoing growth and development instructional personnel).” This account does not include curriculum development and training which, if included, would significantly increase the “professional development” expenditures across Marion County.

<sup>ii</sup> Beech Grove did not spend any money on Instructional Staff Training Service and is therefore excluded from this list.

<sup>iii</sup> See *Dollars and Sense: Elevating the Teaching Profession by Leveraging Talent*

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