

Teacher Leadership During COVID

The COVID pandemic is causing an unprecedented disruption in the learning and well-being of millions of students. With their expertise, voice, and vision, Teach Plus teacher leaders are helping to lead educators and decision makers in their respective schools, districts, and states to tackle the urgent problems of this crisis and drive toward solutions that meet the needs of their students, families, and communities.

Informing Policy and Systemic Response at State and Local Levels

In every region where we work, Teach Plus and Teach Plus teacher leaders have become a critical resource for policymakers and decision makers in schools, districts, and state and local government. Teach Plus teacher leaders brought educator-informed and research-driven priorities to bear on issues such as equitable funding, the digital divide, remote learning, early childhood education, learning loss and recovery, and mental health supports for students and educators. They focused advocacy efforts on students most in need of support—low-income students and students of color—and emphasized how important it is that educators, who have been our communities' front-line responders in addressing the needs of students and families during this pandemic, are at the table when developing the policies and guidelines around teaching and learning during COVID.

Teach Plus teacher leaders held more than 30 meetings with state superintendents, commissioners, and schools boards across 10 states, helping to shape a systemic response to the COVID pandemic in real time.

IN CALIFORNIA, Teach Plus teacher leaders surveyed teachers statewide and identified recommendations for local leaders on three key challenges the state's teachers and students are facing during the COVID crisis: how to prioritize investing CARES Act funding; How to focus on student and community well-being; and how to serve emergent bilingual students. Many of Teach Plus teacher leaders' recommendations for what the state should require in district plans to ensure equitable access during distance learning were included in the state's budget trailer bill and its requirements for the Learning Continuity and Attendance Plan.



"In this time more than ever, we must prioritize funding for the highest-need students, who will disproportionately be impacted by this period of school closures." —Teach Plus Policy Fellow
Jessie Welcomer, San Pablo, California, in CalMatters.



IN COLORADO, Teach Plus teacher leader Catie Santos de la Rosa was the only practicing teacher on Governor Jared Polis' Back-to-School working group that helped to craft new state guidelines on returning to in-person learning. The guidance included changes to quarantining protocols as well as other precautions to ensure a safe return to school for students and staff.

IN MASSACHUSETTS, Teach Plus shaped and conducted a survey, *"Lessons from the Remote Classroom,"* which included responses from 1,600 educators across the state. Survey results were used by the Massachusetts Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education to inform the state's remote learning policies, including addressing social and emotional learning needs for students and adults as well as improving internet connectivity and technology support.

IN NEW MEXICO, state policymakers acted upon the recommendations from Teach Plus' statewide survey of educators to offer free-of-charge training on new online platforms for teaching and learning to teachers across the state. In response to Teach Plus' recommendation to improve communication with teachers during the pandemic, the New Mexico Public Education Department, together with state leaders, hosted a town hall with educators to share information and answer questions about COVID-related policies and guidelines.

IN TEXAS, after hearing Teach Plus teacher leaders' input on health and safety, school re-opening, and school accountability during the pandemic, the Texas Education Agency created a free online training for teachers on trauma-informed instruction during the pandemic. The teachers also helped to inform the Texas Education Agency Commissioner's decision to pause accountability, while preserving the state assessment to capture important information about where to target additional resources and support.



"This abrupt shift to virtual teaching and learning has challenged many of my beliefs and practices as a teacher. So many of the tools I rely on in my physical classroom seem irrelevant or unhelpful when I'm teaching through a screen."—Teach Plus Policy Fellow Sydney Chaffee, Dorchester, Massachusetts, in FutureEd.



"I am poring through the few student records to which I have access from home, in the hope of contacting students who I know were already vulnerable: Students who are struggling with mental illness and other difficult life circumstances and students who have a hard time accessing adequate nutrition and safety under the best conditions. These are the students who are most in need of our collective attention in this crisis."—Teach Plus Policy Fellow David Carroll, Austin, Texas, in the Austin American-Statesman.

Leading and Listening to Teachers

Teach Plus leveraged its expertise in developing educators' skills and leadership to create collaborative spaces for teachers to learn and support one another in transitioning to remote learning. Through **All Means All** collaborative platforms in Illinois and Texas, Teach Plus and Teach Plus teacher leaders provided free, facilitated spaces for teachers in the state to plan, problem solve, and develop strategies for remote learning. In all, these two programs reached over a thousand teachers across the two states.

Teach Plus listened to what teachers needed most during this time and provided safe spaces for them to share, breathe, and be together. In a series of virtual conversations, Teach Plus and educators from around the nation discussed and practiced self-care, addressed best ways to engage parents to prevent learning loss, and took time to reflect on their experiences supporting students and what it would take to move beyond the crisis.

Leading Teams for School Re-Entry

In the summer, Teach Plus deployed its teacher-led Change Agent Fellowship across Chicago, Illinois; Deming, New Mexico; Indianapolis, Indiana; Lubbock, Texas; Richardson, Texas; and Santa Fe, New Mexico. Change Agent Fellows are focused on school re-entry and on customized, school-based solutions to COVID, among other issues. The program launched with Virtual Leadership Summits where Change Agent Fellows and their teams convened to collaborate with experts and peers to develop plans to address the challenges facing their schools.

Sixty-one Change Agent Fellows and their teams receive targeted coaching, guidance, and support from Teach Plus in the development of teacher leadership and change management skills as they lead transformative, student-centered projects for their schools and districts. Across the 2020-21 school year, these Fellows led projects to improve student engagement and pedagogy in remote learning, build relationships with parents and community, practice trauma-informed teaching, and meet the social and emotional needs of their students.



"Continue to practice the grace and patience that so many of you did at the end of the school year. If you are struggling with technology, motivating a child, or the district's content/curriculum, your child's teacher is probably struggling with something similar at home as well. We all want the same thing—to get through this as successfully as possible."—Teach Plus Policy Fellow Arnetta Thompson, Oak Park, Illinois, in Education Post.



Leading and Collaborating with Families

Since the first days of the pandemic, Teach Plus teacher leaders focused on building trusted relationships with their students' families knowing that this partnership was more critical than ever during remote learning. They met families' unique needs, using phone, text, email, and parent communication apps such as Parent Square and Seesaw. They communicated at days and times that met parents' varied work schedules and stressed the importance of communicating in the parents' language. Teach Plus teacher leaders have provided parent care packages, visited their students' homes to help set up technology for learning, hosted Sunday evening parent Zoom meetings, and done virtual home visits to get to know families and caregivers better. These efforts are leading to better student engagement—and success.

Leadership Through Voice and Research

Teach Plus teacher leaders lifted their voices in powerful ways to inform the public about the critical education issues laid bare by COVID. In op-eds and in interviews with regional and national media, teachers highlighted the importance of teacher-student relationships, called for closing the digital divide and supporting students' and teachers' social-emotional needs, and argued passionately for equitable funding, especially for underserved student populations. In research-driven policy briefs and reports, Teach Plus teacher leaders asked educators in their states and across the country to share their stories, ideas, and advice on critical educational issues such as teaching and learning, student equity and needs, student and teacher mental health, and the future of education, schooling, and the teaching profession.



"I wanted my parents to know I am here as a source and resource for school and beyond. So, I made it a point to contact parents to let them know we can do this and get through this together, and I outlined clear steps for how I can assist them."—Teach Plus Policy Fellow Tasha Jones, Springfield, Massachusetts, in Education Post.



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TEACH PLUS TEACHER LEADERS PUBLISHED 9 STATE-LEVEL POLICY BRIEFS IN CALIFORNIA, MASSACHUSETTS, MISSISSIPPI, NEW MEXICO, AND NEVADA WITH RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS ON SUPPORTING TEACHERS AND STUDENTS DURING THE COVID CRISIS



8,407 teachers nationwide participated in Teach Plus state-level surveys providing input about their experiences during COVID and school closures.

Teach Plus teacher leaders conducted 152 virtual focus groups with 532 teachers from 25 states to inform the Teach Plus national report, “Barriers to Bridges: Teacher Perspectives on Accelerating Learning, Leadership, and Innovation in the Pandemic.” The report examines the frontline experiences of educators during the COVID pandemic and provides recommendations for education leaders and policymakers based on teachers’ guidance and input. Among the recommendations: Identify, evaluate, and scale up promising practices and approaches, particularly from teachers who are uniquely qualified to understand and reenvision how schools can best serve children.



“What if we put our money, time, and energy into what we say matters most? What if this school year celebrated imagination? What if we designed a school year that sought to radically shift how communities imagine, problem solve, heal, and connect? What if we remembered that reading, writing, social studies, mathematics, and science are built into our understanding of and response to events every day?”
—Teach Plus Board Member and Policy Fellowship alumna Ashley McCall, Chicago, Illinois, in Chicago Unheard.