



## CHICAGO: TEACH PLUS TEACHER LEADERS SOLVE PROBLEMS OF PRACTICE TO IMPROVE STUDENT OUTCOMES

Schools that aim to improve their students' outcomes face a number of challenges, from principals lacking the capacity to solve every issue in the building to teachers lacking the autonomy, support, or skills to tackle the systemic problems that affect their students. The Change Agent program addresses such challenges head-on. Through the program, Change Agents in Chicago and Indianapolis have successfully led a school-based effort to address a problem of practice in their building.

Collaboratively with their principal, Change Agent Teacher Leaders identify a learning priority based on student data that aligns with the schoolwide strategic plan. Each teacher leader receives intensive leadership training and ongoing support from Teach Plus to design and facilitate sustained professional learning. Through the program, teacher leaders build a purpose-driven team, analyze data to track progress, and collaborate to target specific shifts in teacher practice to positively impact outcomes for their students.

**Michelle Velez**, a 3rd grade teacher at Jose De Diego Community Academy in Chicago Public Schools, focused her Change Agent work on using the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) to build up teacher knowledge and confidence in math instruction. "At my school, only 29 percent of our 3rd-5th grade students were achieving grade level attainment on the NWEA math assessment," says Michelle. "As a teacher, I started to see the need for change beyond my own classroom and began thinking about the school as a whole."



To close the attainment gap, Michelle wanted to shift the primary focus from the lowest group of students to those in the middle. Eager to learn and grow, they weren't being pushed with the same intensity as the lower-performing students. Michelle's vision for her school was to see math instruction in the 3rd-5th grades meet the needs of more students.

Michelle led a professional learning community focused on student-centered and data-driven math instruction. "During three inquiry cycles, we covered vertical alignment and backwards-planning from the CCSS, data analysis and flexible grouping, and targeted small group instruction," she explains. "Once we rooted ourselves in new planning practices, I began to observe and coach my team on their instructional methods in the classroom. My teachers had a safe space to try out new practices and debrief with me on their progress."

As a result of Michelle's leadership, the bar for student performance has risen. End-of-year results showed that 43 percent of students in 3rd-5th grades performed at attainment or above. The school has also seen real change in teacher mindsets and instructional practice. One of the teachers shared this in a survey: "I have been teaching whole group lessons for 25 years. This year I shifted to 100 percent small group instruction. I love it so much I don't think I could ever go back."

**Spring 2017-Spring 2018:  
3rd-5th grade average growth**

