

## ILLINOIS: TEACH PLUS TEACHER LEADERS BUILD A RESTORATIVE PRACTICES MOVEMENT

In Illinois, African-American students were far more likely to be suspended or expelled than white students, and at rates much higher than other states. Teach Plus Teacher Leaders knew that the 2015 passage of Senate Bill 100 (SB100) to create more effective student discipline practices in schools was only the starting point for systems change. With implementation underway, the teachers set out to understand how SB100 has worked at the school level, and how Illinois might better support a long-term and sustained change to restorative approaches in school discipline.

Using the research skills they acquired during the Policy Fellowship, Teach Plus Teacher Leaders surveyed educators in their state to understand how the legislation was being implemented in their schools. They found that:

- Over 84 percent of teachers indicated that the zero-tolerance policies were eliminated and suspensions were limited, as required by SB100.
- Districts provided limited and unsatisfactory training to help schools and teachers implement SB100.
- Districts abolished zero-tolerance policies and limited suspensions but often did not replace them with anything else.

Basing their recommendations for improved implementation of SB100 on their research, Teach Plus Teacher Leaders ramped up a campaign to educate their peers on their findings, presenting at four statewide conferences that reached over 300 teachers. The teachers also met with the sponsors of SB100, who invited them to write legislation to implement their recommendations. Next, Teach Plus Teacher Leaders will publish a toolkit to help teachers improve school-level implementation, and they will work in a coalition to establish a state grant program for districts struggling to implement alternatives to suspension.

Teach Plus Teacher Leaders **Mackenzie Beisser**, a middle school special education teacher in CICS West Belden in Chicago and **Keishonda Simms**, a math, physical education, dance, and health teacher at William H. Ryder Math & Science Specialty School in Chicago, were among the group that authored legislation.



Keishonda Simms

“Our research brought up feelings of powerlessness among teachers. They had been told: “No, we’re not suspending anymore.” Now what? Worse, now that there was no more suspension, kids could do whatever they wanted. We knew that we needed to fill in the gaps with specifics on restorative justice practices. To a group of teachers like us, who had a lot of powerful experiences with restorative practices, this meant a bag of resources that teachers and administrators could use to shape and guide behavior in their building in a way that made sense for their students.”



Mackenzie Beisser

“Our perspective was that of educators but, as a team, we were able to build on each other’s knowledge and shift our mindset to incorporate the lenses of the various stakeholders—students, parents, administrators—who would be affected by the bill. We as teachers have an incredibly important perspective, but ours is not the only perspective.”