

# Teacher Leadership and a Call for Racial Justice

From grappling with discriminatory discipline practices in Los Angeles to building curriculum centered on the murder of George Floyd in Las Vegas, Teach Plus teacher leaders are living and working in the nation's gaping racial divide. With tenacity, brilliance, and love, they are also leading the way to a more equitable tomorrow.

## Leading the Way for Policy Change in States and Districts

Research demonstrates that teachers of color are good for all students, especially students of color. Teach Plus teacher leaders are leading the way toward equitable policy change. Across the country and at the federal level through the Teach Plus Federal Policy agenda, Teach Plus teacher leaders are advocating for policies that recruit, prepare, and retain a teaching force that looks like America's students.

**IN ILLINOIS,** Teach Plus teacher leaders helped to develop the new Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards, which the Illinois State Board of Education has adopted to prepare future educators to teach diverse students. Moving forward, educator preparation programs throughout the state will integrate these new standards into the courses, content, and clinical experiences used to prepare the next generation of Illinois' teachers.

**IN NEVADA,** Teach Plus teacher leaders supported several districts working to close opportunity gaps for students of color, designing and implementing professional learning focused on the use of research and data to inform continuous improvement for every student. The teachers worked to address opportunity, resource, and information gaps, including food insecurity, limited technology, connectivity, and language access.



*"I've witnessed my own children wondering about their place in a system where they don't see themselves reflected, whether that be in the staff or in the curriculum. My son advocated to be placed in the only African American teacher's class in his school his senior year because he realized that he'd never before had a Black teacher and wanted to have that experience."* —

Teach Plus Policy Fellow Keisha Rembert, Naperville, Illinois.





**IN NEW MEXICO**, following the release of a Teach Plus report, *"Transparency and Trends: Teach Plus Teacher Leaders on Creating Opportunities for Students and Teachers of Color,"* the New Mexico Public Education Department included teacher demographic data in a new statewide online data system, to better compare and understand gaps and disparities in racial and ethnic diversity among educators in the state.

**IN MASSACHUSETTS**, Teach Plus teacher leaders worked with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to review and develop rubrics for identifying culturally responsive curriculum for adoption by school districts. Teach Plus-developed rubrics are now being used to identify examples of teaching and learning that best represent culturally responsive practices, and to review, adopt, and implement curriculum in schools.



*"Our relationships with students and their families boldly communicate that, as educators, we're unwilling to be part of a system that makes them feel unwanted. It can start with one conversation."* — Teach Plus Policy Fellow Juliana Urbey, Las Vegas, Nevada.

Juliana was named the 2021 Nevada Teacher of the Year, the first teacher of color to hold that title in the state since 1956.



*"Black teachers provide diverse, honest perspectives and captivating lessons that challenge historical myths and offer anecdotes to evoke change."* — Teach Plus Policy Fellow Shareefah Nadir-Mason, Dallas, Texas, in Education Post.



## Transforming Instruction and School Climate

The movement to build a more racially just educational system begins in the classroom. Teach Plus believes in the potential of our teacher leaders to dismantle systemic barriers and advance equity and opportunity for students.



*"When reading instruction is grounded in a strong evidence base, it can be a powerful tool for equity. But when it's not, far too many children can fall through the cracks, placed at a disadvantage before they even reach the 3rd grade."*—Teach Plus Policy Fellow Lisa Hanifan, Malden, Massachusetts, in Commonwealth Magazine.

## Teach Plus Network for School Improvement

Over the past two years, the Teach Plus/Rennie Center Network for School Improvement (NSI) has worked across 10 Chicago and Los Angeles middle schools to increase the share of Black, Latino, and low-income students prepared for success in mathematics as they enter high school. Applying the principles of continuous improvement, Teach Plus instructional leadership coaches and content partners worked across the Network to develop a shared vision for student success and to implement strategies and improvement cycles to raise engagement, learning, and equity in the classroom. Over the course of the project, Network schools saw significant gains in academic achievement in math among Black, Latino, and low-income students.

Teach Plus is proud to launch and lead a new project in partnership with Chicago Public Schools to increase the readiness of Black, Latino, and low-income middle school students in math and reading. Working across 15 K-8 schools, the Teach Plus Network for School Improvement will support Chicago's teachers, principals, and leaders to develop and implement classroom changes that will benefit student learning while maintaining a central focus on advancing equity in the classroom. Teacher-led teams will develop continuous improvement cycles to advance strategies that promote student learning, support access to high standards, and accelerate progress on grade-level content. Teachers across the Network will also hone their leadership skills to explore and integrate equity into their strategies for teaching and instructional change.

## Teacher Leadership in Philadelphia Public Schools

Over the past three years, Teach Plus' coaching and professional development project in Philadelphia has focused on improving literacy and reading in the early elementary grades, including deep and sustained professional learning around race and equity. Teach Plus teacher leaders across five elementary schools reflected upon their own implicit biases, practiced crucial conversations related to equity, considered culturally relevant pedagogy, and prioritized grade-level reading and language arts content through an equity lens. Teacher leaders have brought this learning back to their schools, facilitating learning with their colleagues about race and equity.

For three years in a row, Teach Plus partner schools have outpaced the school district on academic learning and growth across multiple early literacy measures, including the third-grade state reading assessment. Bayard Taylor Elementary School and Alexander McClure Elementary School were recognized by the School District of Philadelphia among the most improved schools in the city. One hundred percent of the teacher leaders agreed that, "Through the program, I have become more committed to working for equity" and 97 percent agreed that "My experience as a teacher leader has developed me to advocate for equity for all students."



## Advancing Racial Equity in Communities and Districts

### TEACH PLUS CHANGE AGENT NETWORK

With the pandemic exacerbating inequities, Richardson, Texas—a diverse district of 80,000 students—recognized that Teach Plus would be a strong partner in its efforts to advance racial equity. Teach Plus selected 10 teacher leaders as Change Agent Fellows and has coached them to lead change projects in their schools focused on advancing racially equitable practices and policies across the district.

*"Richardson ISD's partnership with Teach Plus is game changing for our district. Two years ago, we adopted an equity policy and began to take steps to actualize the vision of the policy. However, we recognized the need to bring the policy and action to the classroom ... and that is what Teach Plus has brought to RISD." —Richardson Deputy Superintendent Tabitha Branum.*

### TEACH PLUS READY TO LEAD FELLOWSHIP

Across Texas, eight Ready to Lead Fellows have founded racial equity groups, working to build a more diverse teacher pipeline and ensure that teachers of color thrive. Among these, the Austin Avanza group is working with the University of Texas at Austin to mentor aspiring teachers of color and smooth their path into the profession, while Real Talk 2 Percent brings Black male educators together to build culturally responsive instructional practices, and attract and retain Black men in the teaching profession.



*"Ready To Lead has given me the opportunity to invest in Black male educators in North Texas, and help to influence them to not leave the profession. Teach Plus has amplified my advocate voice. Being a young Black male, Teach Plus has put me in rooms I would've never thought I would be in to speak on behalf of scholars and teachers." —Rickey Townsend, Ready to Lead Fellow, Dallas, Texas.*



## Building the Racial Equity Movement

In this year of racial reckoning, Teach Plus teacher leaders played an important role in helping the public understand how racial oppression is often reinforced in our schools—and how schools can help shape a more just future. Teach Plus teacher leaders authored 31 op-eds about building a more racially just education system, offering recommendations on culturally responsive instruction, listening to students about their experiences with race, and valuing parent and community input.

Teach Plus staff and teachers have continued to share the findings from the report, *"If You Listen, We Will Stay: Why Teachers of Color Leave and How to Disrupt Teacher Turnover,"* presenting at 15 conferences, hosting convenings on teacher diversity in Indiana, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Texas, and training policymakers, administrators, and advocates on solutions for retaining teachers of color.

Since its release in 2019, the report has helped to jumpstart a racial equity movement. School system leaders from New Orleans to Chicago to Lonsdale, Minnesota, have cited *"If You Listen, We Will Stay"* as an important inspiration for their efforts to diversify the educator workforce.

**IN ILLINOIS**, as part of this bottom-up movement of change, Teach Plus teacher leaders created an anti-racist toolkit for educators, distributed by Chicago Public Schools and utilized by LaGrange Public Schools and the Noble Network of Public Charter Schools.

**IN NEVADA**, Teach Plus teacher leaders and staff were selected to serve as members of the Clark County School District Superintendent's Teacher Recruitment & Retention Advisory Commission, informing teacher recruitment, support, and retention strategies to promote access to an effective and diverse teaching force.



*"After centuries of avoidance or fear of sounding too political, the recent events and the aftermath of media coverage, social media, and living room conversations concerning Floyd's death are making one lesson abundantly clear: The prevailing whiteness of a classroom doesn't make teachers, including myself, exempt from discussing issues of white privilege and racial prejudice."*—Teach Plus Policy Fellow Shayla Ewing, Pekin, Illinois, in Education Post.



*"As an educator, my job is to teach about the ways race impacts my students. Sometimes, however, I just need to listen. Sitting in silence doesn't send a message of indifference or complicity. It means that I am acknowledging the pain of my students and allowing them the time to reflect and advocate on behalf of themselves."*—Teach Plus Policy Fellow Scoie Green, Katy, Texas, in Education Post.

