

INTRODUCTION

The American Rescue Plan, and the two rounds of stimulus funds that preceded it, provide critical investments to support students whose education has been interrupted during the pandemic, and who have experienced the trauma of isolation and housing, food, and health insecurity. In addition to investing in safety measures, states and districts must make smart decisions about expenditure of stimulus funds—choices that are true investments, impacting students in the short term, and rebuilding the school system for the long run.

Through its programs, Teach Plus empowers excellent, experienced, and diverse teachers to take leadership over key policy and practice issues that advance equity, opportunity, and student success. This paper, developed with the input from Teach Plus teacher leaders nationwide, aims to guide **state and district leaders in investing the ARP funds in ways that advance equity and reap benefits for students now and far into the future.**

Because of their daily engagement with students and families, teachers have critical expertise necessary for making smart decisions about how to invest recovery dollars. The U.S. Department of Education recognizes that states and districts must authentically engage teachers in the decision-making process. That is why the Department is requiring robust teacher and other stakeholder engagement as a part of its state plan [application for the remaining American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief \(ARP ESSER\) fund.](#)

Teach Plus teacher leaders highlight three important priorities for the investment of stimulus funds, each chosen by those who are closest to our educational challenges, interacting with students and families every day—teachers.

- I. Leverage Teacher Leadership to Accelerate Learning
- II. Build a Diverse Teaching Force for Engaged Learners
- III. Build Healing Schools

I. Leverage Teacher Leadership to Accelerate Learning

Given the amount of missed instructional time during the pandemic, students cannot accelerate to grade level without engaging, scaffolded, grade-level instruction by their teachers. Educators must quickly adjust their instruction to current needs, and teachers learn best when they are engaged in ongoing professional learning led by fellow teachers. In order to accelerate the teacher practice change necessary to accelerate student learning in this year, teacher leadership is not a nice-to-have, but a must-have. What's more, effective teacher leadership programs support new teachers, retain effective teachers, build strong school culture, and build a talent pipeline with positive benefits for years to come. Three examples of teacher leadership that accelerate student learning include:

Distributed Leadership: When schools expand the circle of leadership to include outstanding, well-supported teacher leaders, teachers and children thrive.

“Teachers need uninterrupted classroom planning and work time. I know our [Teach Plus Change Agent project] will increase teacher attendance, teacher retention rates, teacher morale, and ultimately student academic performance.”

—Dr. Raymond Falcon, [Teach Plus Change Agent Fellow](#)

Resource Spotlight: The [Achieving More Together](#) toolkit from **New Leaders** provides examples and the necessary building blocks to design and launch a system of distributed leadership in your state or district. The [Teacher Leadership Toolkit 2.0](#) from **Leading Educators** offers strategies to build, support, and sustain teacher leadership opportunities.

Strategic Grade-Level Teams and Professional Learning Communities: Grade-level teams and professional learning communities can act as a key lever to improve teacher practice and advance student learning. In Teach Plus programs, teachers receive training on how to lead professional learning communities and grade-level teams through a Collaborative Inquiry Cycle. They analyze student data, set goals, collaborate on strategies to accelerate learning, assess progress, and adjust the strategy to address student needs.

“I have grown in my ability to create high-quality PLC agendas with clear goals, norms, and roles for each member of my team. I have also gained insight into how to roll out the agendas ahead of time so my team members are prepared. As a result, I’m stronger at building relationships with my colleagues and know how to play to their strengths when delegating tasks - this has all resulted in our execution of research-based instructional practices and increased student achievement across the grade.”

—Teach Plus Teacher Leader, School District of Philadelphia.

Resource Spotlight: [The Levers of Teacher Leadership](#) brief from **Teach Plus** highlights successful strategies to incorporate teacher leadership to grow student achievement and improve schools.

Extending the Reach of Excellent Teachers: Districts across the country are reimagining school structures to ensure that more students benefit from the best teachers.

“[My Teach Plus Leadership Coach] helps me to look at things from a leadership POV, navigate crucial conversations, reminds me to slow down, be concise, have high expectations and trust my colleagues to rise to the task. Our conversations have been a tremendous asset and I look forward to them.”

—Teach Plus Change Agent, Illinois

Resource Spotlight: The [Teaching Innovation](#) paper from **FutureEd** provides two strong examples of programs that extend the reach of excellent teachers.

II. Build a Diverse Teaching Force for Engaged Learners

Research indicates that [teachers of color](#) improve social and emotional learning as well as achievement for students of color. We also know that White students report a [preference for a teacher of color](#) when compared to a White teacher. Yet nationwide, the [percentage of teachers of color](#) (19 percent) lags the [percentage of students of color](#) (47 percent). In order to accelerate student learning immediately and ensure long-term student success, states should allocate a portion of stimulus funds to invest in proven strategies for [recruiting](#) and [retaining](#) a well-prepared teaching force that reflects the diversity of the students it serves.

“Teachers of color are invaluable for students of color because they understand firsthand the social and cultural narrative of their students.”

—Al Rabanera, Teach Plus California Policy Fellow and high school math teacher.

Resource Spotlight: [A Broken Pipeline](#), by TNTP highlights strategies for recruiting diverse teachers, and [If You Listen, We Will Stay: Why Teachers of Color Leave and How to Disrupt Teacher Turnover](#) by Teach Plus and the Education Trust features strategies for retaining teachers of color, as does this [Teacher Diversity & Equity Analysis](#) by The Education Trust.

State and district leaders should invest in the following strategies:

Teacher Preparation for a Diverse Workforce: With teacher attrition associated with the pandemic and following a year that has exacerbated inequities for students of color, it is urgent for states and districts to ensure that new teachers reflect the cultural, racial, and linguistic diversity of the students and are prepared for success in their first years of teaching. A key strategy is investing in programs that have demonstrated success in preparing ethoracially diverse teachers. Examples of these investments include:

- + **Grow Your Own Programs:** Grow Your Own programs are teacher preparation programs designed to recruit and prepare individuals from the local community—such as paraprofessionals and parents—to be teachers.
- + **Teacher Residencies:** Research demonstrates that teacher residencies—in which aspiring teachers are paired with an expert teacher for a full year as an apprentice—increase racial diversity and improve teacher retention.

Resource Spotlight: This [50-State Scan](#) from New America features Grow Your Own programs across the country, and the [National Center for Teacher Residencies](#) and the [Relay Graduate School of Education](#) provide examples of excellent teacher residency programs. The [Teaching Profession Playbook](#) from the Partnership for the Future of Learning contains examples and strategies of effective teacher preparation programs that support culturally-responsive teaching and retention of a diverse teaching workforce.

Culturally Affirming School Environments: According to the Teach Plus-Education Trust report *If You Listen, We Will Stay: Why Teachers of Color Leave and How to Disrupt Teacher Turnover*, a critical strategy for retaining outstanding teachers of color is to create culturally affirming schools environments. What's more, students succeed where they feel seen. Examples of investments that promote culturally affirming school environments include:

- + **Culturally Inclusive Instructional Materials:** Fill classroom libraries with grade-level books that reflect the racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity of the student body. Identify culturally inclusive instructional materials and curriculums, and purchase them for your district. (See [Ed Reports](#) for high quality materials, and engage educators to vet their cultural responsiveness and generate supplementary materials.)

"In increasingly diverse yet divided times, educators owe students access to the breadth and depth of our human existence—and diversifying the literature they read might be our best bet."

—[National Education Association Member Spotlight](#), Takeru Nagayoshi, Teach Plus Commonwealth Policy Fellow and high school English teacher.

- + **Professional Learning on Culturally Inclusive Teaching and Leading:** Teachers and leaders require instruction and practice to learn culturally inclusive teaching and leading skills. Along with culturally inclusive instructional materials, ongoing, high-quality professional learning opportunities are essential components of a culturally affirming school environment. (See [Facing History and Ourselves](#) and [Learning For Justice](#). Then provide stipends for teachers to continue the learning through professional learning communities.)

"If we want to continue striving for academic success and educational equity, teachers must empower their students by diversifying their curriculum to become unabashedly anti-racist and liberating."

—[Empowering our Students During COVID-19](#), Travon Jefferson, Teach Plus Texas Policy Fellow and 5th grade teacher.

- + **Affinity Groups for Teachers of Color:** Because teachers of color are so frequently underrepresented, and because school environments often fail to affirm the identities of teachers and students of color, investments in affinity groups for teachers of color can make an important difference. Affinity groups can provide a space for teachers of color to share common challenges and work to improve their own instructional practice. According to a February, 2021 [article in KQED](#), "Within the intimate confines of an affinity group, educators can address challenges, engage in honest dialogue and cultivate critical thought-partnership with colleagues and trained facilitators."

Teacher Licensure & Accountability Systems that Promote Teacher Diversity & Excellence: States must make relevant data on teacher preparation programs and their effectiveness transparent, and hold educator preparation programs accountable for preparing an effective teaching workforce that reflects the diversity of the students they serve. This one-time investment can support states in [building data and accountability systems](#) that ensure that teacher preparation programs are preparing a teaching force that is equipped to ensure that all students thrive.

Resource Spotlight: [A Fair Chance: Simple Steps to Strengthen and Diversify the Teacher Workforce](#) from the National Center on Teacher Quality provides guidance for states seeking to update licensure and educator preparation program accountability systems. [Tennessee's Educator Preparation Report Card](#) is one example of a data system that provides critical information on teacher preparation programs.

II. Build Healing Schools

Students and educators—especially those in the communities most impacted by COVID-19—have experienced trauma associated with health, food, and housing insecurity, isolation, and loss of life. What's more, many students and educators are experiencing trauma associated with racism and acts of violence and terror. According to the Teach Plus report, [Barriers to Bridges: Teacher Perspectives on Accelerating Learning, Leadership, and Innovation in the Pandemic](#), 89 percent of teachers were more worried about their students' mental health this year than in previous years. Addressing student and educator mental health is a prerequisite.

School-Based Mental Health Services: The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends a counselor-to-student ratio of 1:250. Yet the average across American schools is 1:464, and [low-income students and students of color don't have equal access to these critical resources](#). States and districts should leverage ARP funds to invest in school-based mental health services to address critical needs.

"The rise in mental health challenges and suicide attempts in students during the past year has illuminated how vital social emotional support and learning is for our youth. SEL should be a priority in schools as our communities recover from the traumas experienced over the past year."

—Madison Hays, Teach Plus Colorado Policy Fellow and high school math teacher.

Training in Trauma-Informed Instruction: Across the country, [Teach Plus teacher leaders have highlighted](#) that teachers and other school-based educators need training in how to recognize the signs of trauma and address them in their classrooms.

"The COVID-19 crisis has shed stark light on our students' social emotional needs and is likely to continue to affect teacher and student success far into the future."

—[It's Time to Move Childhood Trauma Legislation Forward in Mississippi](#), Malissa Flowers, Teach Plus Mississippi Policy Fellow early childhood educator.

Resource Spotlight: This [P-20 Renewal Learning Guide](#) provides guidance on trauma-informed instruction (slides 99-119) and how to provide effective mental health services (slides 75-98). This [Texas Education Agency webpage](#) includes examples of trauma- and grief-informed interventions.

Teach Plus recommends that in order to substantively engage teachers, states and districts should:

- + Conduct surveys and/or focus groups with teachers and other stakeholders.
- + Create a teacher or stakeholder advisory committee to collect and analyze input from stakeholders and generate strong recommendations aligned to student needs.
- + Include current classroom teachers on any committee or decision making body determining use of stimulus funds.

CONCLUSION

As Teach Plus connects with outstanding teachers from across the country, their message is clear: Let's not go back to normal. Let's take this moment to rebuild an education system that is better and more equitable than ever before. Timely investments in **Teacher Leadership to Accelerate Learning**, **Building a Diverse Teaching Force for Engaged Learners**, and **Building Healing Schools** will play an important role in addressing urgent student needs, while ensuring that the benefits continue long after the funds are spent.

“Our students need and deserve consistency, stability, and a sense of belonging within a strong educational environment to support their academic achievement and growth. Let's make sure our most critically vulnerable students are not left to pay the price.”

—Jen Loescher, Teach Plus Nevada Senior Policy Fellow and regional math trainer.