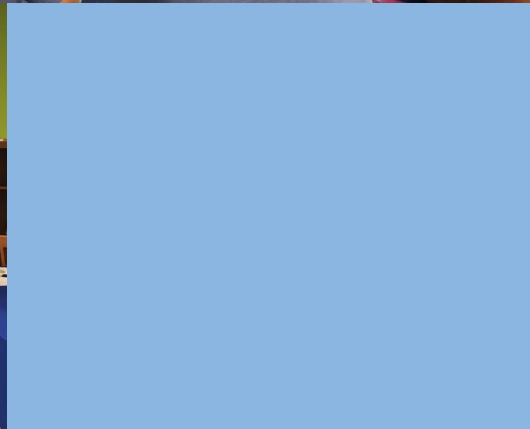
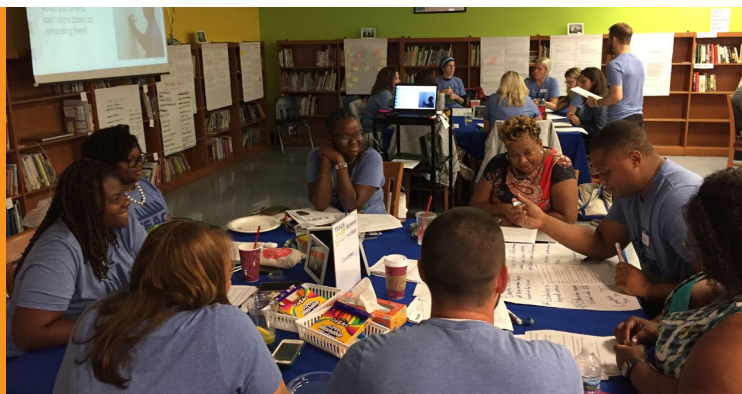


The Levers of Teacher Leadership:

Growing Student Achievement,
Improving Schools



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Winter 2021

INTRODUCTION

Teach Plus began a partnership with the School District of Philadelphia to support five elementary schools in developing teacher-led professional learning communities. For the past three years, Teach Plus Leadership Coaches have supported 40 Teacher Leaders and 17 administrators in shifting the culture of their schools. The central goal of this work was to foster an environment that prioritizes teacher voice and collaboration. These priorities helped produce a workplace that allows Teacher Leaders to focus on student work and make evidence-based decisions. As shown by improved teacher perceptions and student reading outcomes, this teacher-led professional learning transformed each building into exemplars of teacher leadership in action. Though the Teach Plus Teacher Leadership Program model is an intensive coach-embed intervention, we believe the key elements of the program could provide a starting point for any school team looking to better leverage the expertise of their Teacher Leaders. As such, a team of four Teach Plus coaches and 20 Philadelphia Teacher Leaders and administrators identified **five keys to success** in these schools.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Teach Plus coaches and School District of Philadelphia Teachers have identified the following keys to success and best practices as essential in transforming their school buildings into exemplars of teacher leadership in action.

1. Ensure teacher voice and inclusion.

Treat teachers as professionals through compensation and leadership opportunities, for example:

- + Make space in the budget to compensate Teacher Leaders for the additional work they do.
- + Identify Teacher Leaders who will serve on the instructional leadership team and support administrators in seeking out and listening to teacher voice via staff surveys.
- + Include Teacher Leaders in hiring interviews and instructional walkthroughs.

2. Place **equity at the center**

Provide spaces in the form of group professional development to discuss equity, for example:

- + Discuss articles, books, research, and multimedia that build knowledge about equity issues and ask, “How is inequity playing a role here?”
- + Connect historical events and systemic concepts to present, day-to-day, and personal experience.
- + Analyze data together using an equity lens: disaggregate data and look for patterns in demographic outcomes.

3. Implement effective **teacher-led meetings.**

Ensure meeting time and best practices, for example:

- + Centralize agendas and resources and ensure all meetings have clear roles and norms.
- + Garner support from administrators to help protect weekly meeting times from competing interests.
- + Take time up front to strengthen relationships amongst meeting participants and understand working styles and personality types.
- + Use a quarterly inquiry cycle to guide instructional practice change and data analysis.

4. Provide targeted leadership **coaching and professional development.**

Provide regular professional development that prepares Teacher Leaders to facilitate high-impact meetings, for example:

- + Identify an internal or external coach whom teachers trust, or an experienced teacher leader in the school.
- + Block off weekly or biweekly one-to-one coaching time for the coach and teacher leader.
- + Make coaching conversations dynamic and driven by teacher leader needs.
- + Use a tool like the Leadership Attribute Continuum to guide coaching conversations.

5. Focus on **evidence-based decision-making.**

Coach and support Teacher Leaders around being evidence-based decision-makers, for example:

- + Examine student data and work in weekly PLCs to help teams understand student learning needs, measure progress toward school goals, and adjust instructional practices to improve achievement.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

Teacher leadership is an underutilized yet highly effective lever for schoolwide improvement. For over a decade, Teach Plus has supported local education agencies nationwide with developing the leadership ability of their teachers in order to improve schools, increase capacity of teachers, and grow student achievement. In the Teach Plus program in Philadelphia, increasing the leadership capacity of elementary school teachers resulted in both improved workplaces and student academic success.

TEACHER LEADERSHIP

“Our school is a completely different school than it was three years ago before Teach Plus came. All teachers now rely on their team and teachers from other grades. We share information freely and discuss ideas for improvement openly.”

-Philadelphia Teacher Leader

What is Teacher Leadership?

A common refrain from successful students from all backgrounds is that they had one or two particularly important teachers. The central goal of teacher leadership programs is to find these exceptional teachers and provide them with the skills and structures to share their knowledge with their peers. Utilizing the skills of a successful teacher in their school is exceptionally powerful: peer teachers have ample evidence that the methods these teachers use work in their shared context. Put simply, if it works for one teacher in a school, it could work for another.

How Does Teacher Leadership Help Schools?

The research literature is fairly clear on the value of teacher leadership. The literature is rich with evidence that teacher leadership as a form of professional development makes a positive difference in teacher leader efficacy,¹ Teacher Leaders' own instructional practices,² the practices of the teachers they support, and school culture affecting all teachers and students.^{3,4} Several case studies have demonstrated that Teacher Leaders have an indirect effect on student achievement,^{5,6} and the Wallace Foundation's large national study on leadership⁷ supports these claims. Teach Plus's own internal evaluations have shown promising connections between teacher leadership and positive student outcomes, particularly in the most intensive versions of leadership development programming ([See T3 – Teach Plus Annual Reports](#)). Over the last ten years, Teach Plus Teacher Leadership Program schools have consistently outperformed their peer and district schools in student mathematics and literacy proficiency.

What is the State of Teacher Leadership in Schools?

Louis et al.'s review⁷ of 90 elementary, middle, and secondary schools in nine states found that teachers with leadership roles had between *some* and *great* influence on decision making (4.4 out of 6). Internal Teacher Plus evaluations, which review data from teachers across 11 states, are fairly similar. However, analysis of schools with the greatest improvement needs often reveals limited distributed leadership and a desire from teachers to learn more from their peers.

How does Teach Plus Increase Teacher Leadership?

Over the last decade, Teach Plus has empowered excellent, experienced, and diverse teachers to take leadership over key policy and practice issues that advance equity, opportunity, and student success. Through its programs, Teach Plus grows teachers as leaders and empowers them to take action to improve opportunities and outcomes for students. Teach Plus has grown quickly, serving over two thousand Teacher Leaders, a network of 15,000 educators, and working in districts that serve over four million students nationwide. Teach Plus utilizes its internally developed Leadership Attribute Continuum (LAC) to track leadership growth over time. The LAC's four attributes (Purpose-Driven Instructional Leader, Evidence-Based Decision Maker, Skillful Facilitator of Adult Learning, Change Agent) are each composed of several strands, which coaches assess using dozens of indicators. All told, this

continuum assesses nearly 200 leadership activities identified by researchers and practitioners. The Teach Plus Teacher Leadership Program - School District of Philadelphia (SDP) partnership exemplifies this intensive leadership work.

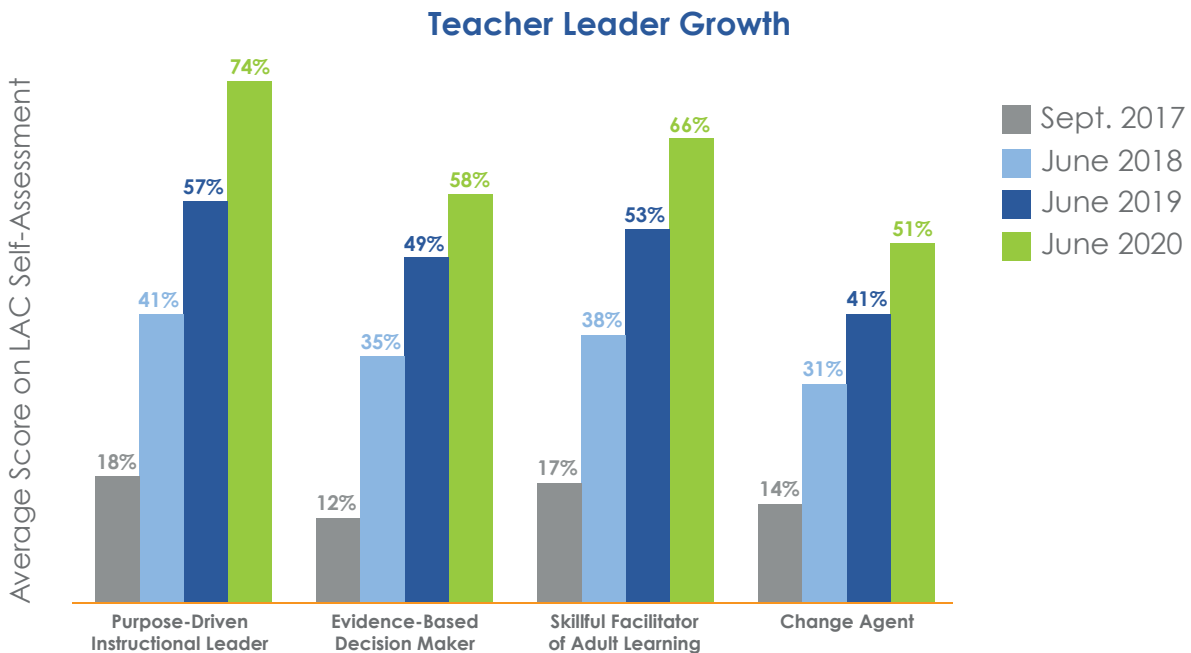
CASE STUDY:

Teach Plus Teacher Leadership Program Philadelphia

In 2017, Teach Plus began a partnership with the School District of Philadelphia to support five elementary schools in developing teacher-led professional learning communities. For the past three years, Teach Plus Leadership Coaches have supported 40 grade-level Teacher Leaders and 17 administrators in shifting the culture of their schools. The central goal of this work was to foster an environment that prioritizes teacher voice and collaboration. These priorities helped produce a workplace that allows Teacher Leaders to focus on student work and make evidence-based decisions. As shown by improved teacher perceptions and student reading outcomes, this teacher-led professional learning transformed each building into exemplars of teacher leadership in action.

Development of Teacher Leaders

Over the three years of the program, Teacher Leaders showed steady and consistent growth in all four attributes of the LAC, a tool created by Teach Plus for coaches to measure leadership growth over time. This coaching framework quantifies and guides Teacher Leaders' leadership growth in four areas: 1. Purpose-Driven Instructional Leadership, 2. Evidence-Based Decision Making, 3. Skillful Facilitation of Adult Learning, and 4. Change Agency. The LAC drives Teach Plus's professional development and measures Teacher Leaders' growth from "understanding" to "applying" to "sustaining" in each attribute.



Change in School Culture

Throughout the program, the culture of the school building also improved. Teacher Leaders and their school-team peers reported near-universal agreement in feeling more confident as a teacher and being able to implement a new teaching practice

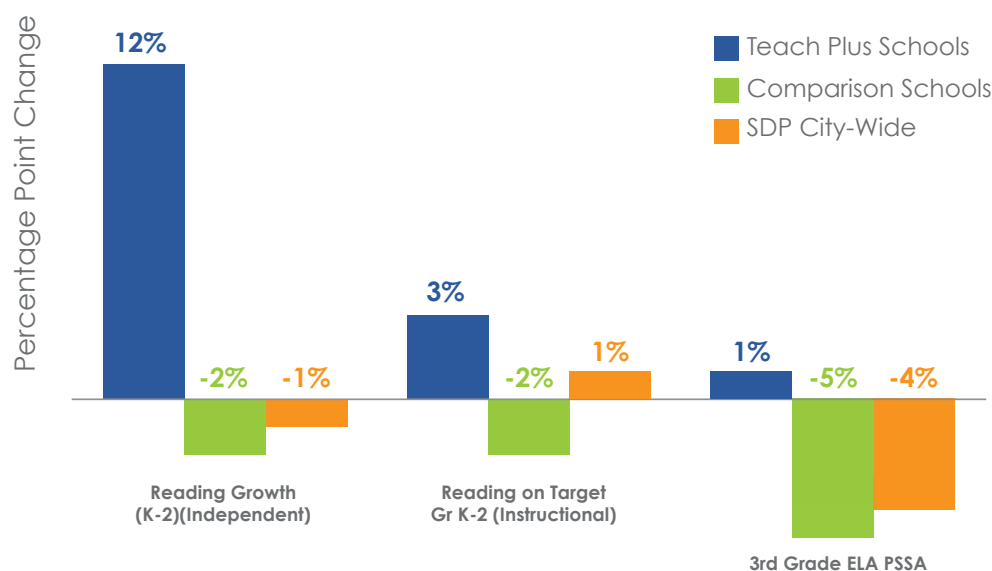
into their classroom based on this work. By program end, nearly all members of teams reported consistent use of data (97 percent), improved practice (88 percent), and improved collaboration (89 percent).

Student Improvement

In building a culture of shared leadership and collaboration, the five schools also saw exciting gains for students. Teach Plus partner school Bayard Taylor Elementary was recognized by the School District of Philadelphia for increasing its School Progress Report score—a measure of student learning—from **10 percent in 2015 to 45 percent in 2019**.

On **several key early literacy metrics** for grades K-3 since 2017, the five Teach Plus Philadelphia schools outpaced both the School District of Philadelphia as well as a group of control schools with similar size, student demographics, and baseline academic performance.

Change in ELA Proficiency (2016-17 to 2018-19)



While Teach Plus was not the only partner at these schools, teachers and administrators consistently credit the contributions of the program for student success:

- + *“As a result of the coaching from Teach Plus, we are able to have an open dialogue about issues that occur in our school. This was not possible before.”*
- + *“My coach has pushed me in ways that I thought I would never have grown at this point in my career which has inspired me to keep growing.”*

How Did We Do It?

Though the Teach Plus Teacher Leadership Program model is an intensive coach-embed intervention, we believe the key elements of the program could provide a starting point for *any school team* looking to better leverage the expertise of their Teacher Leaders. As such, a team of four Teach Plus Coaches and twenty Philadelphia Teacher Leaders and administrators identified **five keys to success** in these schools. These keys, which align directly with the Teach Plus LAC, can be equally of use to those exploring how to empower their Teacher Leaders, as well as those who have already established themselves in the teacher leadership field.

FIVE KEYS TO SUCCESS

1. Ensure **teacher voice** and inclusion.
2. Place **equity** at the center.
3. Implement effective **teacher-led meetings**.
4. Provide targeted leadership **coaching and professional development**.
5. Focus on **evidence-based decision-making**.

KEY 1:

Ensure teacher voice and inclusion.

Ensuring teacher voice means including teachers in schoolwide decision-making, genuinely listening to their perspective and needs, and giving them a platform to share their expertise. It also means compensating teachers for the additional professional contributions they make.

Teachers are at the front lines and often know students and families best, so they are essential contributors to school transformation. One teacher described the impact of feeling heard in their school, *“Our principal lets us have a voice and it spirals through the whole staff. People are becoming more comfortable*

with the fact that their ideas are worth something...Nobody feels like we're being micromanaged anymore. It's now 'you're doing a great job—can you share that with me?'" One principal had previously led all leadership meetings, but after involving teachers noted that, *“Before, leadership meeting agendas weren't coming from teachers. It was my meeting, and it was not good.”*

Ensuring that teacher voice is included in decisions is a key element of the “Change Agent” Leadership Attribute. A top-down, micromanaging structure only distances administrators from teachers, and therefore from students. To combat this, Teach Plus works with administrators to plan for building teacher voice deliberately and purposefully into every aspect of schoolwide decision-making. For example, while grade-team meetings were previously led by administrators with a principal-determined agenda, Teach Plus Leadership Coaches worked with principals and Teacher Leaders to shift the facilitation of meetings to classroom Teacher Leaders. Rather than following a one-size-fits-all agenda from the principal, Teacher Leaders developed agendas with input from their fellow teachers. Teach Plus Leadership Coaches also supported administrators in expanding schools'





instructional leadership teams to include Teacher Leaders, with support and modeling of meeting styles and structures that encourage broad participation and healthy debate. Teach Plus helped administer employee engagement surveys to better understand the perspectives of teachers, and supported administrators in interpreting

and responding to the data. As a result of this shift, Teacher Leaders played an increasingly significant role in schoolwide decisions, participating in instructional walk-throughs, hiring of new teachers, and curricular planning. Importantly, Teacher Leaders received stipends for the additional time they devoted to leadership on top of their regular classroom responsibilities.

Over time, administrators in the program developed deep trust in their Teacher Leaders and an appreciation for the value of teacher perspective. They actively look for opportunities to involve teachers in major decisions. Teacher Leaders better understand and trust the perspectives of administrators and the competing priorities school leaders must weigh based on their work together on the instructional leadership team. At the same time, teachers feel more invested in school decisions and more supportive of schoolwide priorities and initiatives because of the involvement of their trusted colleagues in decision-making and their principals' efforts to hear their perspectives. **Nearly all Teacher Leaders reported improved shared leadership (97 percent) and collaboration (100 percent) in their school.**

As one principal said, *"Teach Plus is a big deal for us. We're one of five schools to be selected by William Penn to launch it. It's because we believe in the future Teacher Leaders and their ability to lead change."* Many teachers were pleased with their inclusion on their school's leadership team, noting that it *"helps everyone to expose their thoughts and ideas to improve the school,"* and has been a place where teachers are *"able to influence decisions of our school and help it to grow and succeed."* One teacher said, *"The leadership design of our school has changed since the beginning of the program. We were a top-down design. We are now an integral part of the decision-making process and included in leadership team meetings."*

KEY 1 BEST PRACTICES

Treat teachers as professionals through compensation and leadership opportunities, for example:

- + Make space in the budget to compensate Teacher Leaders for the additional work they do.
 - + Teach Plus paid each teacher that participated in the program a yearly stipend of \$6,000. With the support of a local foundation and by strategically reallocating school budget funds, Teach Plus partner principals, including Sharon Marino of Alexander K. McClure Elementary, were able to recognize the work of their Teacher Leaders not just in appreciative words, but also with financial compensation, thus helping professionalize and legitimize their additional commitment. Many Teacher Leaders reported that although they loved the work and appreciated the opportunity to weigh in on important school decisions, the stipend was one of the most important reasons they participated in the program.

- + Identify Teacher Leaders who will serve on the instructional leadership teams and support administrators in seeking out and listening to teacher voice staff surveys.
 - + Principal Marino knew teacher leadership was a key driver of school success but was at first hesitant to fully trust her teachers. She wanted to dictate grade team agendas and direct each team according to her vision. After working with Teach Plus for two years, she described the change: *“Over the last two years, we’ve definitely shifted from a top-down model to more of an equal partnership. We still have room to grow, but now Teacher Leaders take ownership of their grade teams and data. It just makes more sense for the people who are living the work to be owning it and running it. Their leadership has led to more staff buy-in, because they are empowered to make decisions more autonomously without constantly wondering if the higher-ups will approve. People’s strengths are being better utilized, and they feel more valued and a part of the process.”*
- + Include Teacher Leaders in hiring interviews and instructional walkthroughs.
 - + Because of Principal Marino’s openness, Teacher Leaders now sit on the leadership team, are members of the interview team, participate in instructional walkthroughs, and take on much of the work that she would otherwise have to do. *“I try to provide opportunities for Teacher Leaders to lead, present, share, and be the ones doing the messaging and branding.”* This approach to distributed leadership has empowered Principal Marino to step back and see her staff truly shine.

KEY 2: Place equity at the center.

Placing equity at the center means focusing work on eliminating differences in opportunities and outcomes along all identity markers, including race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and gender. Equity must drive coaching conversations, professional development, professional learning communities, and leadership team meetings. Race and racism play a significant role in education opportunities, and so must be explored explicitly.

Equity too often takes a back seat to other school initiatives and perceived priorities, which means that professional development frequently leaves equity out. One teacher described the impact of Teacher Leaders’ equity-focused professional learning on the school community: *“It’s helping us examine why we’ve struggled to retain teachers of color. We’re realizing that our school culture is White-dominant, and how that literally made someone leave mid-year.”* Another stated that, *“We’re talking openly about race and seeing equity connections to our work like never before.”* Learning about race and equity shines a light on invisible disparities and needs in the school community.

All five Teach Plus Philadelphia schools serve primarily students of color and operate within systems that have traditionally underserved these populations, so it was essential to examine and disrupt inequities and openly discuss how teaching and learning intersect with issues like White privilege and bias. Teach Plus used a range of





approaches to support Teacher Leaders at various points on the continuum of racial identity development in order to create the focus on equity. First, Teach Plus provided in-depth race and equity training for all Teacher Leaders over the course of a three-day intensive professional development “institute.” The sessions addressed topics like racial identity, White privilege, and bias. In these sessions, Teacher Leaders reflected on their privilege, practiced

difficult conversations, and examined curriculum through an equity lens. They then collaborated with their principal to embed equity into the upcoming year's goals and strategic plan. These three days helped to jump-start conversations about topics that, for many, were previously taboo. Teach Plus made ongoing connections to TNTP's *The Opportunity Myth*,⁸ helping Teacher Leaders see the link between racial equity and ensuring that teachers have high expectations for all their students.

Teach Plus also leveraged regular coaching of Teacher Leaders. In weekly one-to-one meetings with their coach, Teacher Leaders analyzed their craft and their school using a variety of frameworks. Leadership Coaches worked with Teacher Leaders to apply an equity lens to team meetings and role-played challenging interactions with colleagues. In bi-weekly school-based professional development for Teacher Leaders, coaches provided further support: they brought in research, articles, and frameworks, as well as carved out space for in-depth discussions. In some cases, professional development explicitly focused on equity, and in others the coaches would push Teacher Leaders to make connections between the learning and equity. During cross-school professional development, Teach Plus brought in readings about equity and tools for responding to problematic comments.

Through ongoing coaching and professional development, Teach Plus placed equity at the forefront of the work. While some Teacher Leaders met these conversations with resistance, the coaches' patience and persistence helped push conversations forward and support mindset shifts for many Teacher Leaders.

One Teacher Leader said, *“The equity work was eye opening. Forcing an important topic onto Teacher Leaders was definitely uncomfortable at first, but I learned and grew so much from it.”* As a result of centering equity, Teach Plus developed a tool for helping facilitators of adult learning combat frequently heard problematic comments in real time. One Teacher Leader *“loved the concrete examples and practice of speaking for equity to teammates or in meetings. Most of what was written I have heard and questioned how to respond, so seeing it in a practice activity was so helpful.”*

KEY 2 BEST PRACTICES

Provide spaces in the form of group professional development to discuss equity, for example:

- + Discuss articles, books, research, and multimedia that build knowledge about equity issues and ask, “How is inequity playing a role here?”
 - + When second grade Teacher Leader Eileen Broderick of McClure Elementary participated in three days of intensive professional development on how race and equity play out in schools, she was initially skeptical of her White privilege and implicit biases. She had not learned about these concepts, nor reflected on the “invisible knapsack”⁹ she carries with her as a White teacher of almost exclusively students of color. But just a few months later, Eileen excitedly told her coach, *“I’m thinking about race and equity all of the time!”* As a result of continued coaching and professional development from Teach Plus around equity, Eileen started to fully see the multitude of ways race and equity play out in her school and classroom.
- + Connect historical events and systemic concepts to present, day-to-day, and personal experience.
 - + Eileen became more aware of the lack of diversity on the school leadership team, the systemic issues connected to dilapidated building conditions, and the barriers her students and their families face. In just six months, Eileen improved her classroom management, bolstered her relationships with colleagues of color, fought for safer conditions in her school, and advocated for more race and equity conversations to take place – especially among White staff members – in her school.
- + Analyze data together using an equity lens: disaggregate data and look for patterns in demographic outcomes.
 - + One important step Eileen and her coach took to better understand inequity for her grade was to examine student work and disaggregate data. Early on, her team noticed that the students who came in with the lowest reading levels were not growing. That resulted in a call to action and a series of conversations that ultimately resulted in two key realizations: (1) students needed intensive phonics instruction to build their foundational reading skills, and (2) students needed more exposure to grade level texts. Her team spent the remainder of the year collaborating around these priorities and changing their instruction to meet the needs of a group of students that was on the cusp of being left behind. Without an examination of student data using this equity lens, they would not have been able to address this hidden challenge.

KEY 3:

Implement effective teacher-led meetings.

Implementing an effective teacher-led meeting requires equipping teachers to plan and implement purposeful agendas that lead to collaboration and conversation between peers around teaching and learning. Effective teacher-led meetings, also called Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), follow an inquiry cycle framework, have a mix of structure and flexibility, and are driven by the central question: *What changes to our instructional practice will improve outcomes for students?*

Effective meetings are a key element of the “Skillful Facilitator of Adult Learning” Teach Plus Leadership Attribute. PLCs are all too often characterized by administrators running administrative meetings, not teachers running instructional meetings. Other meetings often get derailed by off-topic conversation or lack of structure, ending with no clear next steps or connection to instructional practice.



One teacher described the importance of teacher-led PLCs at her school: *“Team meetings are usually for thinking, discussion and reflection on best practices. The time used to stay focused on instruction is helpful because it provides a link to the purposes and practicalities of the teaching experience.”* Another teacher described the impact on her third-grade team: *“Teach Plus provides clear and measurable expectations for meeting third grade standards. We, as a team, plan rigorous, quality instruction, that helps us to be more efficient when instructing our students.”*



Teacher-led meetings are driven by teacher learning in service of student learning.

Teacher-led meetings do not happen naturally. They require putting structures and resources in place, as well as intensive training of teachers to skillfully facilitate collaboration. Teach Plus first helped define and protect a weekly time for teachers to meet. In collaboration with administrators, they identified a 45–60-minute PLC each week for each grade. Using a quarterly inquiry cycle as a guide, Teach Plus trained Teacher Leaders in data analysis, agenda creation, and meeting facilitation best practices. The inquiry cycle provided the skeleton, but coaches expected Teacher Leaders to regularly communicate with teacher teams and administration to determine the highest-leverage and most urgent agenda topics. Teams used a shared Google Doc for all agendas and resources, which facilitated transparency and centralized resources for use year after year. Teams prioritized relationship building up front, focusing on understanding each other’s working styles and personality types, which laid the groundwork for intensive collaboration. Teach Plus Leadership Coaches then observed meetings and coached teachers using the LAC.

By program end, nearly all members of teams reported consistent use of data (97 percent), improved practice (88 percent), and improved collaboration (89 percent). One teacher concisely described the change to common planning time that they saw after two years with the Teach Plus program: *“More cohesive, meaningful team planning. More effective instructional strategies. Increased teacher empowerment. Better student learning and outcomes.”* Another Teacher Leader elaborated on the range of positive benefits: *“I have been able to work closely with administration in order to set goals, create agendas, and create a common vision for PLCs. Our meeting time is always protected and is set up on a six-day cycle to ensure that even with a day off, PLCs will continue.”*

KEY 3 BEST PRACTICES

Ensure meeting time and best practices, for example:

- + Centralize agendas and resources and ensure all meetings have clear roles and norms.
- + Teacher Leader Chelsea Fay of Cayuga Elementary School kicks off each weekly PLC by reviewing the team’s agreed-upon norms, roles, and goals for the meeting. Without prompting, the timekeeper sets their phone alarm for ten minutes and the recorder begins taking notes in a shared Google Doc where they keep their agendas. The team spends

the first part of the meeting reviewing their small group reading anecdotal notes that show student strengths and struggles over the last week. As the facilitator, Chelsea has already analyzed her own data in advance of the meeting, and so monitors her team and jumps in to support them as needed. Then, she walks her team through a protocol to review research-based best practices that each member of the team has brought to the meeting. The meeting closes with a clear plan for implementing a new instructional practice in their classrooms for a targeted group of students over the coming week.

- + Garner support from administrators to help protect weekly meeting times from competing interests.
 - + This meeting is the product of having a regular, safe space for teachers to meet. Chelsea emphasized the importance of having a structure to follow: *"The support from Teach Plus has helped us use a quarterly inquiry cycle that has guided our PLC meetings and enabled us to analyze data productively to support student academic achievement. Using this structure consistently has allowed me to create meaningful PLC agendas, set common goals, identify action items, and support the development of my team."* Chelsea also described her growth as a facilitator: *"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."*
- + Take time up front to strengthen relationships amongst meeting participants and understand working styles and personality types.
 - + While we often want to jump right into planning and data analysis, highly effective teams recognize the mantra, "culture eats strategy for breakfast." Therefore, Chelsea and her team spent time at the start of the year learning about each other's working styles and personalities, establishing vulnerability and trust, and setting goals and norms.
- + Use a quarterly inquiry cycle to guide instructional practice change and data analysis.
 - + Teacher Leaders are most effective when they both have considerable autonomy over agendas and follow a cycle of inquiry. Teach Plus's inquiry cycle (an aspect of the LAC component Skillful Facilitator of Adult Learning) leads teams through five stages: establishing team culture, prioritizing using data, action planning, teaching and ongoing assessment, and evaluation and reflection. The process includes opportunities for teams to deconstruct curriculum, standards, and assessments, as well as plan lessons collaboratively in detail. Teams analyze quantitative data from exit tickets and progress monitoring, as well as qualitative data from student feedback surveys and team reflections. The inquiry cycle grounds the progression of PLCs and gives teams a road map of their collaborative time together.

KEY 4:

Provide targeted leadership coaching and professional development.

Targeted leadership coaching and professional development will accelerate Teacher Leader growth. Teacher Leaders need a consistent, trusted point of contact to connect with regularly for support. Effective coaching involves meeting Teacher Leaders where they are and supporting them along a continuum of leadership development. Strong professional development is dynamic, prioritized,



and operates cross-grade and cross-school. This allows for diverse learning opportunities and various levels of collaboration.

Instructional coaching for teachers is a well-established practice in many schools, and districts and principals are increasingly provided support on how to lead and manage their buildings. Yet teachers are often thrust into leadership positions without similar support and development. Therefore, differentiated, intentional training for Teacher Leaders is essential to developing their range of leadership skills. Experienced coaches who are excellent

at relationship building will both push and support Teacher Leaders. *“I would not be able to function in this role without [my coach’s] support,”* said one Teacher Leader, who acknowledged that the role can be a lot of work. Having outside direction on leadership growth is also key. In the words of one Teacher Leader, *“Being a new Teacher Leader, [my coach] supported me in more ways than I even knew I needed. Any question, problem, or next step, I felt supported. She has constantly pushed me to know that I am capable and a good leader.”*

Teach Plus first hired and trained experienced coaches with expertise facilitating professional learning and supporting teacher development. Teach Plus Leadership Coaches dedicated a weekly 45-minute block to each of their Teacher Leaders for coaching and professional development in one-to-one meetings. Coaches set individualized goals with Teacher Leaders and differentiated their supports by Teacher Leader, school, and cohort. They used the LAC to guide weekly coaching conversations, bi-weekly school-based professional development, and intensive summer and quarterly cross-school professional learning sessions. Teach Plus Leadership Coaches also served as a bridge between teachers and administration, meeting regularly with school administrators to advocate for Teacher Leaders and help communicate administrative messages to Teacher Leaders. Since schools often do not have an external coach who can be a liaison between teachers and administration, Teach Plus Leadership Coaches helped strengthen staff morale and foster a culture of school-wide collaboration and trust.

Teacher Leaders overwhelmingly appreciated their Teach Plus Leadership Coach:

- + *“I have a trusting relationship with my [Teach Plus] coach. I am able to share confidential information with her and she helps me work through finding a solution. She also shows concern for me in regards to my life outside of work.”*
- + *“[My coach] is the best. She is very attentive and always professional. In everything she does, the scholars are the main focus and my coach asks probing questions to help me pull out the best tools to assist my scholars.”*
- + *“[My coach] has helped me tremendously with becoming a [Teach Plus] leader. One area he has really helped me with is how to acquire and work with data. He has shown me many ways to look at data as well as how to then use the data to better drive our instruction. This has made a huge difference in how we use our data in our meetings making sure we are targeting our weaknesses directly.”*

KEY 4 BEST PRACTICES

Provide regular professional development that prepares Teacher Leaders to facilitate high-impact meetings, for example:

- + Identify an internal or external coach whom teachers trust, or an experienced teacher leader in the school.
 - + B.B. Comegys Elementary teacher Carmen Craig-Williams has been teaching in Philadelphia for 27 years, and she has regularly been recognized by administrators and colleagues as an excellent teacher, achieving academic outcomes in her classroom that far exceed the school average. However, before she began working with Teach Plus, she felt stagnant. As a high-performing teacher, she rarely received constructive feedback on her teaching, and she found school and district professional development to be “generalized” and “not specific” to her individual needs. Now, Carmen’s participation as a Teach Plus Teacher Leader has reenergized her as both a teacher and a leader: *“The coaching has given me a different perspective on how I can lead my team. Now I know that there’s a lot of planning that goes into leading, and I’m better prepared. The coaching I get from Teach Plus is different from any other PD I’ve received, because it’s one-on-one and is focused on our data and our team.”*
- + Block off weekly or biweekly one-to-one coaching time for the coach and teacher leader.
 - + Each week, Carmen sits down with her coach to debrief Carmen’s most recent grade team meeting. The duo identifies successes and areas for improvement and discusses how to apply these take-aways to Carmen’s next PLC. Referencing Teach Plus’s LAC, they identify concrete actions Carmen can take to strengthen her leadership. In weekly one-to-one meetings, Teach Plus Leadership Coaches and Teacher Leaders debrief past meetings, explore problems of practice, collaboratively prepare for upcoming PLCs, and explore student work and research to identify instructional strategies to bring to the team. *“My coach has pushed me to work on my growth mindset and focus on the small steps ... and celebrate the small growth. I always hear her in the back of my head,”* says Carmen.
- + Make coaching conversations dynamic and driven by Teacher Leader needs.
 - + In addition to the individualized coaching, Teach Plus Teacher Leaders also engage in biweekly cohort meetings with the other Teacher Leaders and administrators at their school, where they receive leadership professional development and engage in collaborative school-wide planning. All the Teacher Leaders from across the five schools also come together for three days each summer and three evenings each school year for additional cross-school training and collaboration. *“I like meeting with all the other leaders across the city. It’s big enough and small enough that you can get other people’s experiences and know you’re not doing the work alone. Listening to other leaders’ stories and hearing what they’re doing, sharing best practices, and being forced outside of your comfort zone, that’s very beneficial,”* reflects Carmen.
- + Use a tool like the Leadership Attribute Continuum to guide coaching conversations.
 - + Much like the inquiry cycle guides PLCs, the LAC guides coaching. Teacher Leaders would periodically self-reflect on the LAC, and then discuss their reflections with their coach. In Carmen and her coach’s sessions, they continually referred back to specific language in the LAC and spent a lot of their collaboration around strengthening Carmen’s growth mindset as a skillful facilitator of adult learning.

KEY 5:

Focus on evidence-based decision-making.

Focusing on evidence-based decision-making means that student data and research-based best practices ground the work teachers do in their PLCs. Teacher teams must lean on data and research, rather than social media and pay sites (e.g., Pinterest, Teachers Pay Teachers) when planning lessons and instruction.

One teacher described what it means for her to be an evidence-based decision-

maker as *“keeping a set goal in mind and using intentional data collection throughout the year to ensure we are consistently working towards that goal.”*

Another teacher noted that *“we all know how important data is, but when you're looking at the data and really analyzing it, that's where you have to start.”* The product of effective data work is shifts in teachers' instructional practice. *“Just that one change we make can be hugely beneficial to students' success,”* explained one Teacher Leader.

It is essential to recognize that data and evidence should drive team learning and instructional practice changes. Teach Plus provided intensive support and coaching to Teacher Leaders around one of the four attributes of the LAC, called “Evidence-Based Decision-Maker.” The focus on data, especially in PLCs, involved regular data analysis of student work, co-creating assessment tools, and exploring exemplar student responses. Teach Plus developed an online data tracker to help teams monitor student progress on key metrics. Teach Plus Leadership Coaches also provided technical training for Teacher Leaders around how to use spreadsheets and online tools to analyze student data more easily.

Teach Plus Leadership Coaches frequently brought articles, templates, and frameworks to one-to-one coaching sessions and other professional development sessions. They created an extensive bank of research and evidence-based best practices with open access for all staff to utilize, including data analysis protocols, standards deep dive structures, and research-based early literacy strategies.

All of our Teacher Leaders believe that their experience as a Teach Plus Teacher Leader developed them to **make instructional decisions based on evidence**.

Teacher Leaders explained:

- + *“Being a Teacher Leader has forced me to really deep dive into student work, and data. It has helped me to better understand how to analyze data, and student growth - what is working, what is not, and how to differentiate and scaffold.”*
- + *“Now I never feel a sense of uncertainty about my students and their progress - I feel very confident. I now have evidence to support my claim that they are growing.”*
- + *“We are making more informed decisions. Although people often shy away from looking at data, there has been a school-wide impact - we are learning how to read data and translate numbers into something actionable.”*



KEY 5 BEST PRACTICES



Coach and support Teacher Leaders around being evidence-based decision-makers, for example:

- + Examine student data and work in weekly PLCs to help teams understand student learning needs, measure progress toward school goals, and adjust instructional practices to improve achievement
- + At the start of her weekly PLC, Cayuga Elementary School Teacher Leader Jenn Lowe asks her team to share their student achievement data from the past week. They start by reviewing what mastery of the standard looks like and then make piles of student work based on those who (1) reached or exceeded mastery, (2) fell just short, or (3) or did not master the learning. Because Jenn's team has data from the prior assessment on the same standard readily available, they notice that eight more students reached mastery this time and 10 students moved from the third pile to the second. Jenn then leads her group in a protocol to identify trends – both successes and misconceptions – of the students at the lowest levels. Once they identify what they will reteach in small groups, they explore some shared resources together and discuss how exactly they will reteach the skill. With just 10 minutes remaining in the meeting, the team partners up and practices how they will reteach the skill and then gives each other quick feedback. Under Jenn's leadership and guidance, the team will repeat a similar process each week for the next few weeks.
- + Jenn Lowe has become a data expert over the last three years. She now knows what it means to truly dive deep into student work and make decisions informed by research. More than anything, though, she saw the impact this had on her team: *"The ability of the teachers to see the successful change in the data on the trackers during PLCs was what motivated them and helped them to understand that the change in their instructional practices and efforts were what was making the data move. Seeing this growth helped them buy into the process of using the inquiry cycle to improve our instruction and increase student achievement."* She also saw how data work raised teachers' expectations of their students: *"Using the data and seeing the growth helped my team to realize that students were able to not only do more than they may have previously expected but also raised the bar for themselves to challenge the student more than they may have before."*

CONCLUSION

Leveraging effective teacher leadership into improved workplace and student proficiency begins with the empowerment and trust of local teachers. Teachers are often the school staff best equipped to lead PLCs because of their intimate knowledge of their content, their colleagues, and their students. Trusting teachers means letting go of traditional power structures and making space for teachers to own essential and impactful work. Empowering teachers as leaders means investing in their professional growth and coaching them in leadership best practices. As evidenced by the success of the Teach Plus Teacher Leadership program in Philadelphia, when we trust and train Teacher Leaders, we can leverage their expertise to transform school culture and accelerate student learning.

KEYS AND BEST PRACTICES SUMMARY

1. Ensure **teacher voice and inclusion**.

Treat teachers as professionals through compensation and leadership opportunities, for example:

- + Make space in the budget to compensate Teacher Leaders for the additional work they do.
- + Identify Teacher Leaders who will serve on instructional leadership teams and support administrators in seeking out and listening to teacher voice via interviews or surveys.
- + Include Teacher Leaders in hiring interviews and instructional walkthroughs.

2. Place **equity at the center**

Provide spaces in the form of group professional development to discuss equity, for example:

- + Discuss articles, books, research, and multimedia that build knowledge about equity issues and ask, “How is inequity playing a role here?”
- + Connect historical events and systemic concepts to present, day-to-day, and personal experience.
- + Analyze data together using an equity lens: disaggregate data and look for patterns in demographic outcomes.

3. Implement **effective teacher-led meetings**.

Ensure meeting time and best practices, for example:

- + Centralize agendas and resources and ensure all meetings have clear roles and norms.
- + Garner support from administrators to help protect weekly meeting times from competing interests.
- + Take time up front to strengthen relationships amongst meeting participants and understand working styles and personality types.
- + Use a quarterly inquiry cycle to guide instructional practice change and data analysis.

4. Provide **targeted leadership coaching and professional development**.

Provide regular professional development that prepares Teacher Leaders to facilitate high-impact meetings, for example:

- + Identify an internal or external coach who teachers trust, or an experienced teacher leader in the school.
- + Block off weekly or biweekly one-to-one coaching time for the coach and teacher leader.
- + Make coaching conversations dynamic and driven by teacher leader needs.
- + Use a tool like the Leadership Attribute Continuum to guide coaching conversations.

5. Focus on **evidence-based decision-making**.

Coach and support Teacher Leaders around being evidence-based decision-makers, for example:

- + Examine student data and work in weekly PLCs to help teams understand student learning needs, measure progress toward school goals, and adjust instructional practices to improve achievement.

ENDNOTES

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