

Teaching and Learning Through COVID-19 in Indiana

Round 2 Focus Groups: Key Takeaways

ABOUT OUR PROJECT

As the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to change and shift the educational landscape across Indiana, teachers have been on the frontier of navigating this new terrain. As classroom teachers and Teach Plus Policy Fellows, we wanted to better understand the impact of the pandemic on teacher retention, while offering educators the opportunity to share their opinions, insights, and experiences of teaching and learning during Covid. We wanted to know what has worked well and what needs to change in response to the lessons of the last year and a half.

To gauge this, we have been holding a series of focus groups in the winter-spring 2021. Fifty-three Indiana teachers participated in our first round of focus groups and thirty-eight gave their input in the second round of data collection, speaking to teacher professional development and student progress, as well as job satisfaction and their likelihood of remaining in the profession. In the final focus group, we will delve into parent engagement and administrative support. Below are our key takeaways from the second round of focus groups.

ROUND 2 FOCUS GROUPS: KEY TAKEAWAYS

While teachers appreciate the flexibility their administration provided when it came to professional development (PD), the pandemic shone light on new types of PD teachers need, such as DEI, technology adaptability, trauma-informed instruction, and more, in addition to content-driven support.

- + Exacerbated by the pandemic, the need for differentiated, quality professional development appropriate for individual teachers' needs continued to be a point of tension in teachers' perceptions of PD in general.
- + Many teachers highlighted the need for more professional development around non-content support for students, emphasizing a desire for more development on understanding and incorporating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), trauma-informed instruction, and technology.
- + Teacher career ladder schools, such as the NIET's TAP System for Teacher and Student Advancement, were elevated as a positive structure for consistency and support for teachers and students in a hectic time.

“Our administration decided all teachers would receive the same professional development to promote ‘unity’ when we really needed differentiation.”

“The things that I have benefited from have been mostly by my own discovery, and not by the planned PD by the district. I hope we continue to have PD on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. We weren't able to fully have these discussions this year, because so many covid related things took over our lives, but these topics are very important.”

Teachers want differentiated professional development that is holistic and relevant to the reality of their teaching and emphasize that they need time and space during the scheduled workday to implement PD into their work in the classroom.

- + Teachers emphasized a need for time and space during the scheduled workday to participate and then implement professional development within their classrooms, leveraging collaboration time with colleagues to effectively move students and improve their practice.
- + This finding further echoes one of the recommendations from Teach Plus Indiana's [Improving As We Go](#) report, highlighting the need for educators to have time during their regular schedules for professional development that address both their immediate and long-term needs.

“We need more time to do PD. And more time to process and walk through it.”

“I do constantly feel like I am behind on many tasks, and that I just struggle to stay caught up on the endless stream of expectations that the school, administration, student, and parents have for me.”

While the transition back to in-person learning has benefited student engagement, teachers continue to be aware of the barriers that continue to exist for student academic success as well as student mental health, social development, and technology support.

- + Teachers celebrated the benefits of returning to in-person instruction, naming improved student engagement, better-integrated technology, and smaller class sizes as positives. Yet teachers continued to highlight the barriers they face when working to support all students in various instructional models such as virtual, in-person, or a combination of both.
- + Teachers voiced concerns about the challenges many of their students experienced during the extended period of remote learning such as meeting social-emotional needs and navigating virtual learning expectations.

“The inconsistency of student attendance, lack of support staff, and a shortened school day (this year) also impacted the intervention and other support we were able to give students.”