



SESSION 2: BUILDING A STRONG TEACHING FORCE

Moderator: *Jonathan Travers – Director, Education Resources Strategies*

Panelists:

- *Jarvis Sanford – Managing Director, Academy for Urban School Leadership*
- *Jesse Solomon – Executive Director, Boston Plan for Excellence*
- *Monique Burns Thompson – President, Teach Plus*

How do we get good teachers in our lowest performing schools?

“A great pipeline of teachers is not enough,” said Jesse Solomon, Executive Director of the Boston Plan for Excellence. “Without leadership, systems, culture and norms, you’ll get marginal change not transformation.” In this panel, Solomon, along with Jarvis Sanford, Managing Director, AUSL and Monique Burns Thompson, President of Teach Plus, emphasized the importance of the *system* for supporting and keeping good teachers in low performing schools.

Background and Theories of Action

Teach Plus: Burns Thompson began the session with a description of the Teach Plus program, which emerged from a conversation with Boston Public Schools Superintendent Carol Johnson about staffing for failing schools. The result of that conversation was a set of focus groups with high performing teachers, asking them what it would take for them to teach in the highest need schools.

“Teachers did not want to go alone; they didn’t want to be the only teacher in a struggling school ... Teachers wanted a cohort of peers with similar skills and belief systems,” Burns Thompson

noted. “They wanted a rigorous process—you don’t get to do this just because you’ve been in the profession for a long time. It’s not about longevity.” In addition to a collaborative community of teachers, the focus group teachers asked for additional time for planning, high quality, distributed leadership and differentiated pay.

To meet those requirements, Teach Plus developed the Turnaround Teacher Teams initiative (T3). Teach Plus currently has 67 teachers teaching in 6 schools in Boston, making up about 25% of the staff in each of the schools. The additional cost of each Teach Plus teacher is about \$16000.

Academy for Urban School Leadership: Jarvis Sanford from AUSL also emphasized the need for high quality teacher teams. “The teacher pipeline is critical. At a new [AUSL] turnaround, 60% of teachers are AUSL teachers. This really makes a difference.” He described the organization’s dual mission of managing turnaround schools and training teachers. In their 19 schools, 14 of which are turnaround schools, AUSL serves over 10,000 children. The AUSL Teacher Residency, which trains 90 residents per year, helps prepare new teachers for AUSL turnaround schools, through a 4-day per week internship in a classroom with a mentor teacher and 1-day of classes. Residents emerge with a master’s degree in education and teaching certification.

All the teachers in the Residency and in the AUSL schools are CPS teachers and most belong to the Chicago Teachers Union. AUSL emphasizes teacher development. “We work with teachers on their core competencies. We help teachers figure out where they are on the continuum and how to

improve. “As part of that assessment, AUSL administers a “Measure of Academic Progress” or MAP test four times a year “to help teachers learn and grow.”

Funding for AUSL is a balance between public and private dollars. The organization raises about \$16 million per year, with 1/3 of that contribution coming from Chicago Public Schools.

Boston Teacher Residency: Solomon explained that because of the many higher education institutions in the vicinity, Boston Public Schools never has had trouble getting enough teachers. However, the system was not retaining teachers. The Boston Teacher Residency was developed to create a teacher pipeline of trained teachers to stay in BPS Schools. The Boston Teacher Residency is similar to the AUSL Residency program in terms of classroom experience and coursework (described above). BTR residents spend one year in the program, with 4 days in a classroom with a mentor teacher, and one day of coursework. They also receive induction support for the first three years of their teaching career.

After 9 years, about 50% of those trained through the Boston Teacher Residency are still teaching in BPS, and 95% of principals want to hire BTR people. The big question for Solomon is whether the Residency is having an impact: “Are schools getting better and are students learning more?” He described the ongoing challenges as systemic. “We’re convinced that without the comprehensive work around the structure of a school, the human capital work will be marginal.”

Solomon also argued that this work really isn’t about school turnaround. “Some schools are designated turnaround schools, but in BPS that is only 11 schools” even though many more schools need the help. He pointed out that turnaround status is a somewhat artificial distinction, and

urged summit participants to work towards good schools overall, which requires a systemic response.

Lessons Learned

The importance of a mix of experience level for improving instruction and instructional culture: Burns Thompson noted that “We have seen over and over again that when we can pair master teachers with pipeline teachers, we can rapidly grow the capacity of all those teachers. At Blackstone school, the first-grade team is made up of a combination of teachers that went from 27% proficiency to 83% proficiency.”

The need for investment in improving teacher quality: Sanford noted, that “Most of the schools where we have turnaround are in high-poverty areas. Boston Teacher Residency may be expensive, but it’s more expensive to have schools that continue to be inadequate in educating a whole segment of society.”

The need to train teachers specifically to work in turnaround schools: Teachers need to be prepared to work in these particularly challenging environments.

What can partners do that districts can’t?

The roles of partners in relation to the school district: Both Sanford and Solomon noted that their organizations, compared to the Chicago Public Schools and Boston Public Schools respectively, were more “nimble.” Sanford described how: “A bureaucracy is a challenge. We’re able to do fundraising and match public dollars with private dollars. Philanthropists are often not willing to give funding to a district, but they will give to us. We can give teachers career ladders.” Burns Thompson highlighted the importance of the partnership, noting that Teach Plus couldn’t fulfill its mission without support from the district, including removing barriers in

the Human Resources department, negotiating with the Teachers' Union and "providing protection for our teachers during downsizing." Teach Plus reciprocates by being able to "staff up a school with master teachers in very specific areas." Last year, for example, Teach Plus hired a Portuguese Creole speaking fifth-grade science teacher. "We can do that in a way that a district (who has to hire so many new teachers each year) cannot. We can have a level of intensity around training and support because it's our focus."

Other key issues

Initial screening process for finding the "Right People": The Residency programs include review of applications. People who make the initial cut are then reviewed in person by a panel that asks "tough questions." Solomon noted that the Residency Programs are a "year-long job interview. We have built in the idea that 10-15% of residents will be exited before the end of the program." Teach Plus, which is focused on identifying master teachers, includes multiple levels of review, beginning with a series of essays from each applicant on their impact on student achievement. "You can tell the people who are master-level teachers and can provide evidence of progress, have leadership potential, etc." The next steps for Teach Plus include a full day of interviews and classroom observation.

The mismatch between current teacher evaluations, which are individually focused, and what we know about teacher effectiveness, which requires teacher teaming:

There was agreement that there is not a lot of data in this area, but that surveys are beginning to help. Teach Plus is working with Harvard professors to develop and conduct these surveys, and the Boston Teacher Residency draws on a BPS survey of school climate that gets to some issues of collaboration. "So far, we're learning that the

colleague-ship is very important," Burns Thompson noted.

The need for conversation between organizations like TFA, traditional teacher prep programs and those represented on this panel: While Residency programs provide more training for new teachers, programs like Teach for America and the New Teacher Project have their place and are thinking seriously about teacher preparation. Solomon argued that until Residency programs prove that they improve student achievement, "I give TFA a pass on doing a residency... In the meantime, let us all compete and measure our work thoroughly and figure out what is most effective." Burns Thompson emphasized the need for partnership between master teachers and new teachers, which "accelerate" the capacity of both groups. "Maybe districts just need to partner with different organizations that provide different things, such as TFA provides new teachers, and Teach Plus provides master teachers."