

Agency into Action

Teachers as Leaders and
Advocates for Public Education,
Communities, and Social Justice

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INTRODUCTION

The association between family wealth and educational outcomes has never been more pronounced (Reardon 2013). Growing income inequality impacts access to a range of opportunities, including high-quality pre-school, childcare, neighborhoods, healthcare, schools, and enrichment activities, all of which contribute to children's well-being, skills, educational attainment, and, in turn, life chances. Although efforts to reform the school – through increased accountability, increased choice, structural adjustments, and technical innovations – have attempted to address the widening achievement and opportunity gaps, they have yet to disrupt the structures, cultures, and practices that effectively maintain this system of inequality.

In particular, these efforts have largely failed to improve what matters most in the education of our children: the teaching and learning experiences offered. The Annenberg Institute for School Reform (AISR) at Brown University conducted the Teacher Leadership and Advocacy (TLA) study

to explore the role teachers can play (and are playing) in ensuring that public education continues to be a forceful driver of social equity. We explore how teachers, alongside family and community partners, are utilizing their experiences and expertise to share new ideas and evidence that can continue to build an ecology for equitable education reform. Specifically, we explore how teachers are leading and engaging in advocacy for policy change that can lead to system change and improvement.¹

Teacher leadership and advocacy for education policy provide an opportunity for teachers to share their vision of public education and to shape its direction in a way that recognizes teachers' shared responsibility to unite voices and create a greater impact. The TLA study does not contend that teachers must do more – their focus on cultivating the cognitive, academic, and social development of every learner in their classroom is more than a full-time job. Rather, we explore how collective leadership and advocacy can foster the professional growth

and efficacy of teachers by extending their reach and impact. This study documents the work of a growing number of organizations that are working to lift teachers' voice, acknowledge and recognize teachers as professionals, and advocate on their behalf and that of their students.

This report describes AISR's efforts to gain a better understanding of the roles that teachers can play in affecting education policy outside of the classroom. Through case profiles of a broad range of organizations that are working to create a culture that continues to prioritize and value public education, we situated our research in relation to the advancement of educational equity. We believe that teachers are not neutral transmitters of knowledge or mere "implementers." Rather, teachers play a crucial role in the provision of a

¹ For more on AISR's work on teacher leadership, see Saunders et al. 2017.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What do we know about teacher leadership and advocacy?

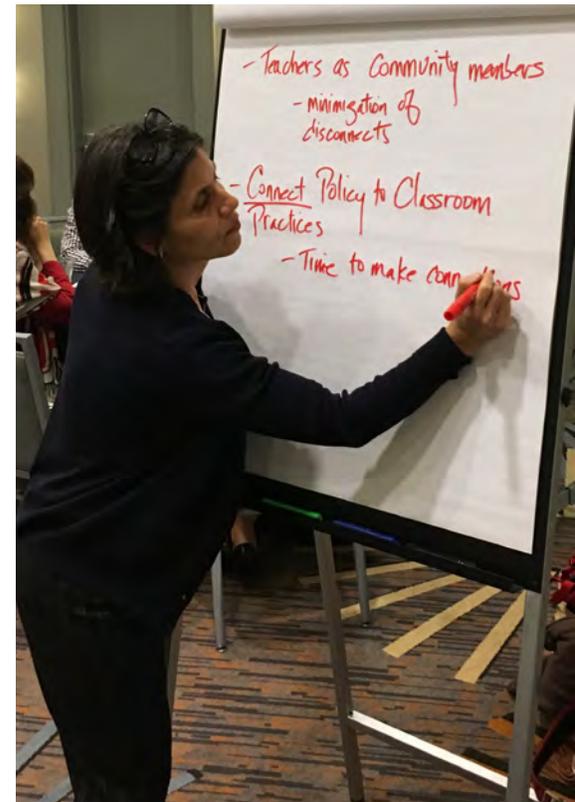
There is increasing acknowledgment among researchers that teachers must be part of educational reform efforts (Rust 2009). Indeed, teacher leadership is seen as a key resource for improving student learning (Darling-Hammond et al. 2009; Fullan 2001). Teacher leadership is defined as the “process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement” (York-Barr & Duke 2004, pp. 287–88).

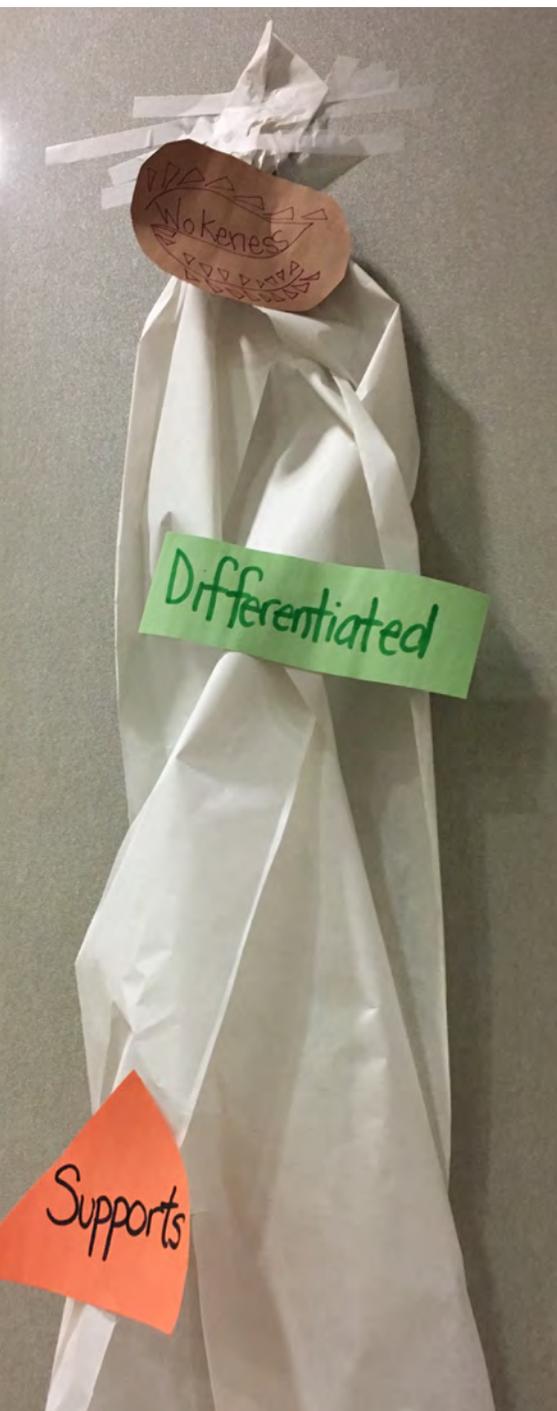
Teachers are most likely to learn to lead effectively when they are able to sustain “ties with external organizations and groups that supply intellectual, social, and material resources for their work” (Little 2003, p. 416). Research also indicates that when teachers develop leadership skills, they increase their own teaching capacity, and have a positive effect on other teachers, students, the school culture, and the academic outcomes of their

students (Coggins & McGovern 2014; Lumpkin, Claxton & Wilson 2014). Providing teachers with the opportunity to influence the environment in which they work can also improve the retention rates of high-quality teachers (Aspen Institute 2014).

Despite these findings on the benefits of teacher leadership, few studies have focused on the potential of teacher leadership at the system level; they remain focused at the individual teacher, classroom, or school level. A few studies, however, find that teacher leaders can have an impact outside the classroom by using their expertise and credibility to influence policy (Hatch, Eiler White & Faigenbaum 2005). These small-scale studies demonstrate ways in which teacher leadership is moving away from models that view teacher leadership as the formal authority of one teacher over others, and toward models that see it as the opportunity for teachers to collectively assert their influence on research and policy audiences through their own

voice and advocacy, in collaboration with the citations and advocacy of researchers (Hatch, Eiler White & Faigenbaum 2005).





These findings point to the value of enabling teachers to develop leadership and advocacy skills, including communication, inquiry, and collaboration that provide opportunities for them to share their ideas and insights with a range of audiences, including traditional policymakers. A review of the literature clearly demonstrates that additional, larger-scale studies are needed to examine teacher leadership at the systems level (Ash & Persall 2000).

Teacher advocacy builds on a foundation of knowledge, reflection, and self-awareness. It is directly linked to action and is fostered through dialogue with other individuals via a range of avenues, including in-person communications and text (Peters & Reid 2009). The literature on teacher advocacy often focuses on teachers as advocates for particular populations of students – for example, English learners, special education students, or students with disabilities. This literature makes clear that an advocacy model for teacher development must incorporate discursive practices that challenge existing practices, cultural beliefs, and understandings (Peters & Reid 2009). For teachers to become effective advocates they must assert their agency; understand how advocacy is exercised (as counter-hegemonic narratives to dominant ideology, structures, and practices); and understand the relationship between knowledge, reflection, and action inherent in transforming belief systems, practices, and structures (Peters & Reid 2009). Importantly,

advocacy can be viewed as both an outcome of efforts to transform teaching and learning through equity, and as a means for transforming education.

Teacher leadership and advocacy reflect teacher agency – both individual and collective. That is, teachers' work is supported through establishing relationships, breaking down barriers, and marshaling resources throughout a school or organization in an effort to improve students' educational experiences and outcomes (York-Barr & Duke 2004; Ketelaar et al. 2012). Agency is not something teachers "have," but something they do or achieve (Priestley et al. 2015). Agency is also motivated – it is linked to the intention to bring about a change in the future that is different from the past or present (Emirbayer & Mische 1998). While the research suggests that agency is strongly influenced by the environment – through the interactions between individuals and contexts – the literature is often limited to what happens in classrooms, such as teachers enacting or resisting curricular content (Achinstein & Ogawa 2006; Lasky 2005; Buxton et al. 2015). Indeed, research has found that teachers feel as though they have little agency outside of the classroom or school space.

In particular, teachers feel they have very little influence in policy decisions that affect their everyday life (Gyurko 2012). In order to achieve influence within policy, teachers rely heavily on advocacy organizations that provide educators with a large array of roles depending on the mission, function, or model of the organization itself.

These organizations work to increase teacher agency by shaping and enhancing policy that increases the opportunities for teachers to assert their influence beyond the classroom, make decisions, and help frame future actions (Priestley et al. 2015). Unions remain the most prominent voices on behalf of teachers, whereas organizations focused on teacher voice often aim to provide an alternative platform for teachers to be heard (Behrstock-Sherratt et al. 2014).

As depicted in Figure 1 and described in the pages that follow, agency is transformed into action through leadership and advocacy efforts organized by the membership of TLA organizations. Shown by the two-way arrows, collective leadership and advocacy efforts, in turn, support teacher agency. Collective efforts focus on disrupting oppressive systems in education and beyond, while connecting with students, parents, and communities. Through a range of platforms for policy and advocacy, the organizations enable shared learning and collaboration toward advocacy and work directly to dismantle those challenges and barriers that often impede these collective efforts.

The varied configurations identified among TLA organizations allow for diverse levels of advocacy. Some organizations, for example, anchor their efforts on curricular changes and framing policy discourse through professional development, while other organizations focus more heavily on direct policy engagement. The collective efforts of TLA organizations can result in policy outcomes at the

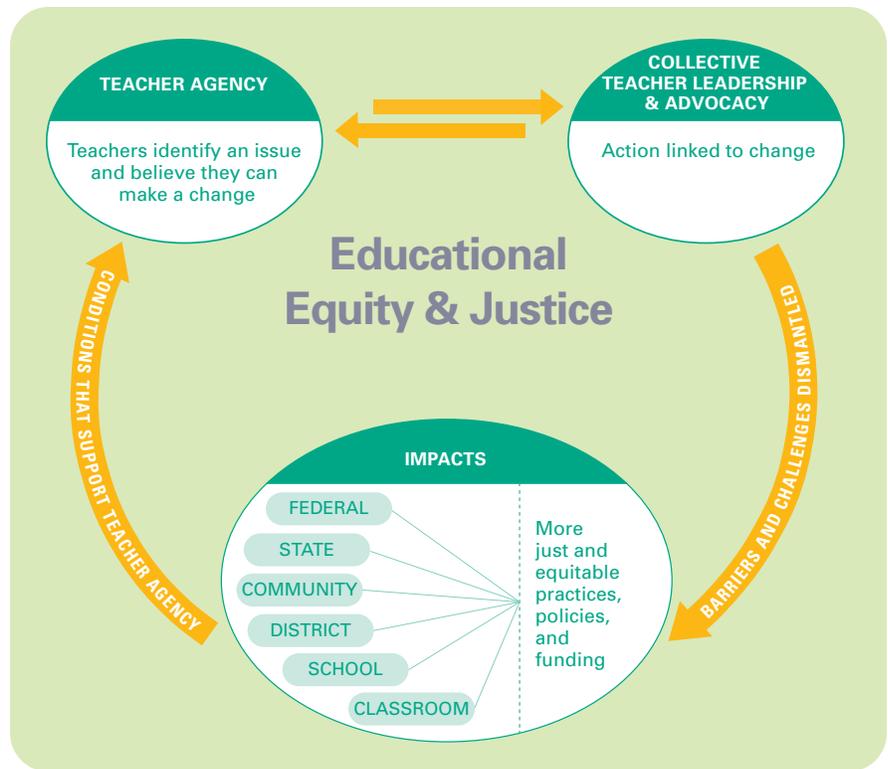


FIGURE 1 Teacher Leadership and Advocacy Conceptual Map

national, state, and local levels. TLA organizations can provide a space for connection and collective action towards sustainable efforts to advance educational equity and justice. These efforts also contribute to policy and practice outcomes that help establish the conditions and environments that support teacher agency.

DATA COLLECTION AND METHODS

Data for this qualitative study were collected in three distinct phases: informational interviews, a convening of teachers, and case profiles.

Informational interviews were conducted with key leaders in the education field from 18 identified teacher leader organizations located across the nation. Using a snowball sampling methodology, we inter-

viewed leaders from organizations we were aware of and asked a series of questions that enabled us to understand the range of efforts nationwide. We also inquired about other known organizations and/or efforts engaged in promoting and supporting teacher leadership and advocacy.

A two-day convening of teachers was held in April 2017 in Chicago,

Illinois. The purpose of the convening was to gain knowledge and perspective from classroom teachers who were involved in teacher leadership and advocacy for education policy through organizational membership. Participants came from 18 school districts, 13 states, and 14 organizations.

Based on information gathered through the informational interviews





and convening, six organizations were selected for case profiles. Profiles aimed to offer a better understanding of how teachers engage in policy leadership and advocacy. Selected sites represented organizations working on educational policy in local, state, and/or national contexts. All organizations selected for participation prioritized the membership of classroom teachers and aimed to lift the voices of their membership and the community in setting the policy advocacy agenda. Additionally, we selected sites that explicitly claimed an equity and social justice agenda. Organizations selected used diverse methods of policy advocacy, including but not limited to organization advocacy, labor union organizing, social media, grassroots activism, and professional development. Through one-on-one interviews with organizational staff, teacher leaders, and other key organizational stakeholders, we gained perspectives

on teacher advocacy and policymaking; the range of assumed teacher roles; supports required; the outcomes and impact of identified efforts; and challenges. This report is based on the analyses of these data.

Appendix A provides additional information on data collection methods and analysis.

FINDINGS

Six organizations are at the center of this study. Each organization has developed diverse strategies to support teacher leadership and advocacy, resulting in varied outcomes.²

- The Association of Raza Educators (ARE) is a grassroots, membership-driven organization composed of educators, university professors, students, and community allies. Working together, ARE members advance critical social and political consciousness and Raza liberation. Through praxis workshops and statewide conferences, it advocates for Ethnic Studies in California and beyond.
- Badass Teachers Association (BATs) is also a grassroots, membership-driven organization. It has a strong national online presence, and its advocacy and policy efforts support the importance of teacher voice as well as student-centered education. BATs members engage in policy through a number of actions, including running for elected offices and testifying in public spaces.

- The Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ) is a national non-profit that aims to improve public education by tapping into the “bold ideas and expert practices of teachers.” Most teachers engage with CTQ through the CTQ Collaboratory, a virtual learning space. Members identify the Collaboratory as providing an important space to “connect” with other educators and to share their stories of impact. Through articles, blogs, and book chapters, teacher leaders are able to spread their influence beyond their networks.
- The Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) is a labor union engaged in social justice advocacy and policy. Since 2010, CTU has made the collective activity of members the core of the union. The role of union leadership has been to support, facilitate, and activate teacher voice.
- Educators for Excellence (E4E) is a national nonprofit that champions better outcomes for students and the elevation and prestige of the teaching profession. E4E’s mission is to ensure that teachers have a

leading voice in the policies that impact their students and profession. E4E drives change by building a movement of teachers, identifying and training teacher leaders, creating policy recommendations, advocating for the implementation of their recommendations, and scaling the model to reach critical mass in the communities they serve.

- Teachers Unite (TU) is a New York City-based nonprofit teacher leadership organization that works to transform schools into democratic and inclusive places by building power through union participation, organizing, and transformative/ restorative justice approaches. TU stands with coalitions that call for the end of racist disciplinary policies in schools and the implementation of policies that invest in the safety and dignity of all students.

² For more detailed profiles of the organizations and their strategies, see pages 23–27.

Together, these organizations serve as the main protagonists in the larger story we aim to tell about teacher leadership and advocacy. Organized by our research questions, we offer the following thematic narratives, using the voices of staff and teacher leaders from each of these organizations to bring them to life.

Why engage teachers as leaders and advocates?

The TLA organizations profiled recognize that teachers come to the profession with the belief that they can make a difference in the lives of their students – both within the classroom and beyond. Teacher agency is based on this belief. Through leadership and advocacy, teachers are provided the opportunity to exercise, with greater influence, their agency within the school setting and system, and to help shape the profession. Through leadership and advocacy, teachers work collectively to execute their ideas – ideas that are based on their knowledge of students, families, and communities. Teacher leadership and advocacy also contribute to the profession’s sustainability and advancement, as constructive and collective engage-

ment leads to greater teacher satisfaction and retention.

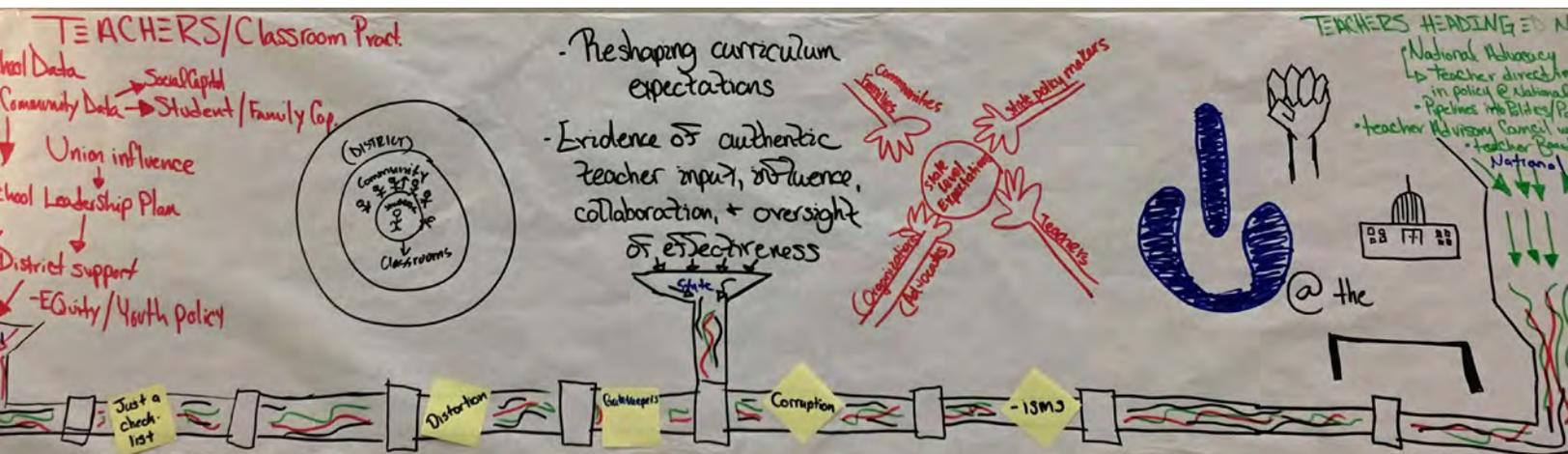
TO TAP INTO TEACHERS’ EXPERTISE

The most robust finding is the consistent respect for and framing of teacher expertise as imperative to the education policymaking process. While this finding may seem obvious, it is still important to report. Even as a great deal has been written regarding the need to apply and amplify the practical experiences, expertise, and knowledge of teachers, teachers still feel woefully underutilized and even ignored in education policy-making (Hatch, Eiler White & Faigenbaum 2005). However, among leaders and members of TLA organizations, there is widespread understanding that teachers are best positioned to both implement policy and lend their pedagogical and content knowledge, expertise, and familiarity with students and families to understand how policy plays out on the ground in classrooms, schools, and communities.

“I think it’s important to involve teachers in advocacy work because [they are] impacted the most,” a teacher from BATs explains. “Not being able to have a seat at the table

or having a say in what decisions are being made is where the problem comes in – that’s where the disconnect is.” Notably, the organizations profiled work to advance policy and shape the policy agenda. They help identify and lift up the needs, ideas, and innovations of teachers and share these ideas broadly. Teachers are seen as leaders in policymaking rather than solely responders and implementers. As a teacher from E4E shared, although historically teachers’ work has been limited to the implementation of policy, “Teachers should be engaged in the policy creation process . . . policy implementation . . . and in the evaluation of that great idea.” The traditional, top-down approach has “failed to capture the expertise of the people who are going to be doing the doing.”

Members of organizations shared their frustration that their agendas are largely reactionary. In the case of CTU, for example, members feel the continued and ongoing need to “respond” to the politics and the policies of the district and the city although they have worked hard to set out proactive visions for the schools and city that Chicago students deserve (Chicago Teachers Union 2012;



Noonan, Farmer & Huckaby 2014). Like the other organizations profiled, CTU members are not afraid to critique their educational systems. Members prioritize responding to community needs and partnering with them to advance high-quality education. An ARE interviewee shared:

We are extremely critical of the system of which we're a part. . . . We don't romanticize that we as educators are going to liberate everybody, but I think we are critical of ourselves, we're critical of the system, we're critical of even some of the leadership that we work under. We have administrators within our membership, and it's good, because we get that varied perspective of how to work within the system, how to work from the outside, how to work with community members.

TO DEMOCRATIZE EDUCATION POLICY FOR BETTER SCHOOLS AND UPLIFTING COMMUNITIES

For many teachers and TLA organizations, the critical perspective described in the previous paragraphs leads to a second purpose for engaging teachers as leaders and advocates that centers on the democratization of education policy for better schools and stronger communities. At the core of much of the work discussed by members of TLA organizations is the goal to create more just and equitable schools. Indeed, as one member of TU shared,

The overarching goals of Teachers Unite are to work with parents, and youth, and community to work on social justice issues that the union is not, and eventually have union members driving the agenda of the union, so that those resources are used to improve the quality of education in New York City.

Similarly, a BATs teacher explained, “true teacher leadership for us has to have social justice.” Teacher leadership, she continues, requires identifying and working toward changing those factors that impact students’ lives and learning: “You’ve got to call out poverty.” Embedded in this approach is the core assumption that teachers should be supported to act in solidarity with the communities in which they teach. By engaging in education policy work in ways that frame their involvement as alongside students, families, and communities, teachers develop sensibilities, policies, and practices that align with the interests of each of these constituencies. As a CTQ member stressed,

If we are really serious about equitable public schools for all kids, . . . to me, the primary advocacy voice should be the people who know the work and know the students the best, and those are two stakeholder groups, parents and teachers.

CTU’s work makes it apparent how important and effective it can be for organized teachers to create opportunities for the engagement of entire communities in advancing solutions to educational policy challenges. The union supports teachers to engage with parents not only about academic issues, but regarding important policy that impacts public schools. As one member explained,

We have done a lot of that in terms of flyer-ing at elementary schools in particular, because that is where parents drop off and pick up, so that you’re expanding exponentially the number of people who are potentially involved in advocating for a solution to the budget crisis or school funding formula, etc.

Another member shared how CTU has experimented with canvasses in the school community through union meetings followed by door knocking to “talk about legislative and city council initiatives and why it’s important getting parents involved in those things.”

TO INCREASE TEACHER SATISFACTION AND RETENTION

In addition to the important implications teacher leadership and advocacy have for the policymaking process itself, there are benefits for teachers themselves.

Lack of funding and resources, lack of time, lack of opportunity to collaborate and engage with colleagues, poor compensation, poor working conditions, and a lack of a supportive school climate are just some of the factors that contribute to low teacher satisfaction and retention rates (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond 2017). For example, recent emphasis on teacher evaluation has created atmospheres in which teachers feel attacked and unsupported. “When we are being observed or evaluated the feedback is not based on what we’re doing and the quality of what we’re doing. It’s what we should be doing, based on an arbitrary framework,” stated one CTU member. “Those are things that make educators so stressed and consider everything to be their fault. It’s less likely they’ll stay in the profession. It’s way too stressful. . . . Those relationships that make education a positive experience, they’re not there.”

In addition to the likelihood of improved policies, implementation, schools, and communities as a result



of teacher leadership and advocacy, study participants shared how their engagement in leadership and advocacy can improve the teaching experience (and hence, retention) even in the midst of existing educational challenges. To some extent, the lack of relationships cited earlier is mitigated by engagement with a TLA organization. One E4E participant shared, “knowing that there’s this network of other teachers” and “knowing that they can effect change, and that they can engage beyond the classroom” contributes to a positive experience. The networks created by advocacy and policy can break the isolation that teachers can feel as a result of school schedules and structures that impede the opportunity for collaboration and professional learning. As one TU member reflected, “I think it helps a little bit with burnout. It can feel really isolating to be a teacher. It can feel really isolating at your school. . . . It also can be really depressing and part of the burnout.” The teacher shared that by joining TU, “it gives

people some of the prestige that you don’t really get from the teaching profession.” The opportunity to lead workshops and share ideas boosts a teacher’s sense of recognition, impact, and ownership. “You don’t get treated very nicely as a teacher, so the fact that I got flown to Oregon to go to a conference felt nice.”

Furthermore, positive relationships are based upon trust. In too many schools the distrust between teachers, administrators, district officials, and policy-makers breeds counterproductive educational environments. However, teacher engagement in policy and advocacy can advance positive teaching attitudes and leadership (National Network of State Teachers of the Year 2015). As one member of ARE expressed:

Teachers who get involved in [leadership and advocacy] are more likely to have really positive attitudes towards their jobs. . . . A lot of teachers are extremely disgruntled and generally unhappy and there is

this general us against them – teachers against admin – attitude. It’s always like a war. . . . There is this mistrust. People speaking for you are not speaking for you, for your interest. If teachers get involved in these ways they are more likely to feel ownership and to have a sense of trust.

The rationale for why we need to engage teachers as leaders and advocates for education policy is clear. Policy is better for the integration of teacher expertise in its development and implementation. The deepening of our democratic practices can only further advance the integrity of public education as a foundational resource for our nation’s democracy. And teachers who feel supported and heard, and who have a sense of ownership of their work, will serve as the kind of teachers all of our students, families, and communities deserve. TLA organizations understand these imperatives.

How are profiled organizations dismantling challenges and barriers to leadership and advocacy?

Organizational leaders and members identified a wide range of challenges and barriers that impede the leadership and advocacy efforts of teachers. As described in this section, each of the profiled organizations attempted to meet these challenges straight on. Among those barriers most often cited were lack of time for teachers to take on leadership positions and to advocate for new policy or policy changes; current school and system structures that maintain teacher isolation and prohibit collective efforts to engage in leadership and advocacy outside of the classroom; and the struggle to shift the public's perception regarding their profession. As this section highlights, leaders and members of TLA organizations worked to dismantle these obstacles through collaboration and the power of collective efforts and learning.

TIME

Study participants discussed how much time teachers dedicate to preparing and teaching their classes. Ensuring that students' learning needs are met – academic, health, and social – requires teachers to prioritize the demands of the classroom; participants felt that the time and energy they could devote to other activities was limited. Participants shared how the issue of time is especially challenging for those who are assigned more preps, and/or are working in school environments where student, family, and community needs are greater. Newer teachers are especially vulnerable to time constraints. As an ARE member shared, newer teachers might not be able to envision a world beyond the classroom, and strengthening their content and pedagogical expertise might require an overwhelming amount of additional time. However, teachers must recognize, early on, the critical role of leading and advocating for policy:

For a newer teacher, you spend your first three years figuring out what you're teaching – you're just feeling it out, what works and what doesn't. . . . If you don't get teachers, especially younger teachers, involved in advocating as an educator and as a professional early on you lose them. You lose them.

The timing of policy-making events also poses a challenge. As participants shared, these events, more often than not, take place during the school year and during school hours. Accordingly, as one TU member pointed out, “a lot of things that we get invited to [like] policy working groups, meetings, whatever, are during the school day, and so teachers and students can't go.” An E4E member shared, “if a teacher wanted to share their story they would have to take a day off of school to go into the legislature and testify, and some contracts are more challenging than others in allowing that to happen.”

Some organizations countered time challenges by offering resources to release teachers for policy and advocacy activities. E4E enables teachers to engage in activities outside of the classroom by providing funds for substitute teachers. CTU also offers resources to release teachers from the classroom. While providing release time for members is helpful, it doesn't resolve the issue. As a CTU member shared, “A lot of times what we see is that there is a level of frustration that we aren't doing enough to effect the kind of change necessary to really transform lives in meaningful ways.” Lack of time prevents teachers from doing more.



CTQ is working to alleviate the challenge of time by advocating for hybrid teacher positions and structural changes. Hybrid roles enable teachers to lead in and out of their schools and districts. Hybrid teachers spend time both in the classroom and outside of the classroom “incubating and executing ideas for teaching and learning reforms at the school, district, state, and national levels” (Berry 2015). In addition to engaging teachers and serving as virtual coaches through webinars and writing extensively about policies and practices, teachers in these hybrid roles also serve to redesign the school so that teachers have increased time and opportunity to share their expertise with their colleagues.

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS TO COLLABORATION

Time constraints are also related to another challenge widely cited by TLA organizations – the limited opportunity to connect with peers and partners. For most teachers, the opportunity to network or collaborate with other teachers is limited to their brief “prep” period or scheduled (weekly or monthly) professional development. Teachers spend most of their time disconnected from their colleagues – planning, teaching, and reflecting on their practice alone. The TLA organizations profiled aimed to address this challenge by providing teachers with the opportunity to network and collaborate with other teachers, community partners, and other key stakeholders. As one teacher from BATs shared, “I got online and I started researching, and I found this

group. It was a support system. It helped me to find my voice and be able to know that I’m not standing by myself.” The member continued, “to know that there are other teachers across the nation that are facing the same problem, and they’re supporting me, it’s an invisible solidarity.”

While many members of TLA organizations indicated that they initially joined the organization to address their feelings of isolation, their membership quickly took on new meaning. Interviewees indicated that their membership meant more than just being with “like-minded” individuals – it was about taking action collectively. Interviewees shared that it was important for them to move beyond “just talking about the problem” to coming up with an action plan to address the problem and acting collectively to implement the plan. As a leader of CTQ pointed out, teachers have always been involved in advocating for changes in policy. “We knew a policy was not functioning effectively and so we would find a workaround.” However, as the CTQ leader points out, historically “we couldn’t do that as a group in the system, we could [only] do that as individuals.” Membership in TLA organizations provides members with the knowledge that their individual efforts are related to a collective endeavor.

Members of TLA organizations recognized that part of their work also entails conveying to other teachers that their voices can make a difference. As one CTU member shared, “There are definitely some teachers that want to hide in their classroom,

because they don’t know if [their participation] will make a difference, but part of our job as delegates and activists is to make them realize that it does make a difference. . . . I tell them, “I know you’re afraid of striking or I know you’re afraid of the reactions to fight back, but you should be more afraid of what happens if you aren’t vocal and you don’t fight back.”

CTU interviewees indicated that fear of retaliation often works to keep teachers isolated in their classrooms. Speaking out against particular policies and injustices and demanding change of the system (especially the system that provides one’s paycheck) requires risk-taking. According to a few participants, fear was the biggest barrier to teachers’ engagement in leadership and advocacy of policy. As a CTU teacher conveyed,

A lot of teachers don’t feel they have the same protections. Tenure doesn’t mean much anymore. Schools can target you for your evaluation or there is constantly instability with layoffs. . . . People always worry they’re on the chopping block.

To meet goals and achieve objectives, members indicated that TLA organizations must work to remove barriers not only among teachers but also between teachers, the community, and other key stakeholders. As a CTU member shared, “There is strength in numbers. . . . Having community and parents is key to that.” Similarly, a member of TU indicated, “I don’t think that Teachers Unite has impacted city, state, or national policy

on our own. . . . Our whole model is about doing it in collaboration with young people and families at the city level and at our individual school levels.” Members of TLA organizations hoped to lead and to work with other leaders across the school hallway, the district, the city, state, or nation in creating and shaping educational policy and reform that best meets the needs of *all* students. An E4E member shared, “there are a lot of smart people trying to move the system, and now I see how my work connects, and now I have this other resource.”

Networks not only work to bring teachers together and reinforce a sense of a shared purpose and collective struggle, but they also bolster multiple roles and capacities for teachers. Profiled organizations tapped into the knowledge that teachers learn best from other teachers and have the capacity to lead; to share their ideas, experiences, and expertise; and to inspire their colleagues, students, families, and community to support needed policy or change. Membership in TLA organizations can provide teachers with the opportunity to acquire and/or further develop the tools and skills necessary to take on these multiple roles that function to break down barriers.

As a leader of CTQ shared, we are working to “thin the classroom walls.”

SHIFTING PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS THROUGH THE GENERATION OF NEW KNOWLEDGE

Teachers in the United States feel their work and efforts are undervalued. Indeed, results from the Teaching and Learning International Survey conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) demonstrate that while American teachers work harder today under much more challenging conditions than teachers elsewhere in the industrialized world, two-thirds feel their profession is not valued by society – an indicator, according to the OECD, that ultimately impacts student achievement (Darling-Hammond 2014). For the many leaders and members of the organizations who participated in this study, when teachers’ voices are heard, and when their opinions, ideas, and expertise are sought after by others, including policymakers, we will begin to move in the right direction towards valuing teachers and their contributions. As a leader of E4E shared,

We don’t think about the intangible element of power and how draining it is to be in a profession where you feel like your voice doesn’t matter, it doesn’t matter how hard you’re working, it doesn’t matter what great ideas you have about how the system could work better for kids, none of that matters. That’s really draining and exhausting.

Participating TLA organizations aimed to shift the public perceptions of the teaching profession through a range of strategies. While the strategies employed varied across organizations they shared a common focus on

generating new knowledge that directly challenged existing practices, normative beliefs, and understandings.

TLA organization leaders and members, for example, indicated that to effectively shift the public’s perception of teachers, it is vital for teachers to feel valued and engaged within their own school settings. TLA organizations indicated that they provided support to members to shift how colleagues engaged with each other at the school level. An ARE member shared,

We can go deep with the work, because we’re capable of it. . . . It’s been really, really, really empowering for us to see that people trust us to help them with that. We have been helping in our professional development not just to show them how to get ethnic studies off the ground in terms of the actual content, structure, and the pedagogy, but we have also been helping them with developing their organizing skills. . . . We’re helping them to organize in order to get resolutions passed by their board, and using the community as pressure to make it happen.

TLA organizational members also indicated that they felt confident about their ability to contribute to the improvement of the school, and played a key role in creating a school culture where their contributions were valued.

To shift public perceptions, the TLA organizations we profiled also aimed to persuade their membership that teachers needed to engage in issues beyond the classroom or school site and partner with parents and other

stakeholders. One CTU member shared:

Part of [the work] is having tough conversations around where you, as a teacher, see this headed if you're . . . not engaging in more explicitly political conversations and developing relationships with your colleagues and parents in the broader community. . . . We [are in a] better position to improve conditions for ourselves and others and the students you care about, and that's why you got into this work. We're saying, "Everybody deserves health-care. Everybody deserves adequate housing. Everybody needs a decent job. Every community has to have anti-violence initiatives that can disrupt this epidemic. And in particular the communities most afflicted with divestment, institutional racism, historical neglect." That has resonated and helped people to understand that our roles don't end at the bell.

By working alongside partners to make changes within and across communities, the talent and commitment of teachers is recognized beyond the school setting.

To ensure teachers gain the legitimacy both within and outside of the school setting to begin to shift perceptions, participating TLA organizations indicated that they worked to provide members with the necessary skills, knowledge, and tools. At E4E, leaders spoke about how teachers acquire these skills:

We run a teacher policy team every year, where certain teachers go through this process of developing their skills as researchers. They're like a cohort model, and then they craft



the policy paper. We also simultaneously run advocacy teams, where they're building their skills on how to vision what a campaign should be, how to do assessment, power mapping of who the stakeholders are, how to develop strategy and tactics, and then how to execute those tactics.

A BAT's member shared how a critical component of their work is "educating the educator." She shared,

You got in this for the students . . . to make a difference and to inspire

the child. If the things that we're doing or the things that they're telling [us] to do are not working, it's causing more harm than help, then your role is to be that child's voice. That's the message that educators need.

CTQ provides a suite of tools that focus on creating and sharing stories of teacher expertise, and impact. The tools help teachers develop complex and multifaceted stories that "show evidence-based impact on student



growth and teacher growth. . . . [These stories] are driven by evidence, intentional outcomes, audience, and bold calls to action” (Byrd 2017).

Through TLA trainings, and by attending meetings, teachers share knowledge; generate new knowledge; and build, develop, and/or scaffold the skills of teachers for effectively informing public discourse around education policy. A leader of CTQ notes that when their organization began to provide guidance and mentorship to support shared learning and storytelling, membership grew quickly. He states, “We began to grow even more when those teachers learned systematically how to articulate powerful stories from their practice and from evidence which CTQ continued to help teachers assemble.”

What are the policy-oriented outcomes associated with teacher leadership and advocacy?

When teachers are empowered to collectively engage in policy and advocacy efforts, it can result in more equitable schools and more socially just communities. Teachers are connected to students, parents, and their school sites, and therefore represent a powerful and uniquely positioned constituency in the realm of education policy. All six of the organizations profiled shared compelling outcomes in the context of their policy and advocacy efforts.

POLICY “WINS” INFORMED BY TEACHERS’ KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERTISE

Several policy wins discussed by organization members were enhanced by the knowledge and experience of teachers. There was a wide array of policy focus ranging from the local to

federal level across various policy issues. National organizations focused on broader issues that, at times, were also addressed locally. Some instances of success consisted of actual policy wins while others worked hard to frame key policy conversations.

We acknowledge that each of the organizations profiled leverages distinct and/or multiple sources of influence. CTU, for example, can harness people power through its district-wide membership. Through E4E’s resources (e.g., funds and paid staff), it can provide organizing support and has the potential to assist teachers and schools with release time and other needed provisions. While ARE, BATs, and TU rely on teacher volunteerism, the close ties to students, families, and community provide a powerful source of influence. Meanwhile, CTQ leverages its

strong district ties to create opportunities for teachers to advance curricular changes in the classroom and beyond school walls.

What follows are brief examples of the different ways in which TLA organizations approached influencing policies in various contexts. The examples we share are by no means exhaustive of the issues and strategies from each organization, but rather provide a wide overview of the diverse ways in which TLA organizations can influence education policy.

Three organizations from this study – BATs, CTQ, and E4E – operate nationally. Although they have very different organizational structures and focus on different issues, they all operate with a national frame that shapes local action and intervention. The remaining TLA organizations included in this study are more locally focused. ARE operates statewide in California, but our interviews engaged members who are all teaching in the Los Angeles area. The other two organizations operate primarily within a single large city – CTU in Chicago and TU in New York City. Not surprisingly, the focus of these organizations was more localized overall, enabling them to approach policy issues in ways that included robust community collaborations and engagement.

Badass Teachers Association (BATs)

BATs is a nonprofit organization run by a board of directors and has a large national membership. Overall, BATs has consistently voiced concerns regarding issues such as standardized testing, Common Core Standards,

and the expansion of charter schools. While much of their activity is focused on generating widespread social media activity (e.g., “Twitter storms”) about key issues at strategic moments, this larger discursive framing work has influenced local action as well. For example, one BATs leader discussed the treatment of children whose families had opted out of standardized testing in a local district:

[School and district officials] were threatening parents that if they didn’t bring their kids during the testing time – if they brought their kids in after the testing time – they were going to make them sit the time in the afternoon, so they would miss gym, they would miss art, they would miss all the afternoon activities and just make them sit the time that they should have sat for the test.

As a result of these actions, there is now policy written that enables students to read during the testing period, and that respects the rights of the families that refuse testing. As the leader explains, “and that was because of the support that I got from BATs.”

Educators for Excellence (E4E)

E4E is also nationally based and has focused on a number of policies and issues with national significance like the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and the Common Core State Standards. Member surveys, focus groups, and one-on-one meetings between members and staff shape E4E’s national and local policy priorities. Through a series of trainings, E4E

supports its teacher members to develop the knowledge and skills to become effective advocates with peers, administrators, elected officials, and other educational stakeholders.

In addition to the focus on federal policy, E4E members have also applied their energy to local and statewide issues by engaging with and influencing local power brokers in education reform. For example, they have worked to engage with the local teachers’ union in Los Angeles, UTLA, around key policy issues. One E4E member reported:

They just passed a motion pushing for UTLA to include in its position that the district spend 50 percent of its existing professional development bank time, time that already exists, on instruction, and specifically instruction for the implementation of the next generation science standards and Common Core.

She noted that currently this time can be spent on anything. This work represents the organization’s efforts to translate its focus on national issues to the localized context.

Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ)

CTQ is an “action tank” that is committed to connecting, readying, and mobilizing teacher leaders to transform the teaching profession. CTQ not only identifies and analyzes empirical evidence of the factors that matter most in improving teaching and learning, but also works to prepare teachers to integrate this research with policy and their own experiences, as they advocate for students and the profession. CTQ provides a space for teachers to learn



from other teacher leaders (through stories), and how to engage with other stakeholders to craft and implement education policy.

Although CTQ's organizational activities are not directly aimed at specific advocacy for particular policies, CTQ has successfully shifted conversations about teacher leadership in a way that has subsequently influenced policy-makers. "We have impacted the conversation in very subtle ways where other organizations and even Departments of Education are talking about teacher leadership in different ways," a CTQ leader explained. "I didn't want it to become a buzzword. I didn't want teacher leadership to just be one of those words that then leaves a powerful idea behind it." As such, CTQ has defined teacher leadership to help frame ongoing conversations at all levels, "not just the classroom but also at the highest levels of education policy crafting." In doing so, a growing number of schools and systems are turning towards teachers for design and decision-making authority.

Association of Raza Educators (ARE)

ARE members focused on district-wide and statewide issues centered on Ethnic Studies and decolonizing education.

One member summarized, "We're helping [ARE members] to organize in order to get resolutions passed by their board, using the community as pressure to make it happen." Through a close focus on the Ethnic Studies Now campaign – a statewide effort with local community roots – ARE has successfully worked to enact change within California, and continues to push for the growth and sustainability of ethnic studies curricula.

As one member shared, "Here in the state of California we were instrumental in helping getting AB 2016 passed."³ Members explained that ARE is currently working with the Ethnic Studies Now campaign to encourage the state senate to invest funds to support ethnic studies because "right now there is no money in the budget set aside to ensure that we have well-trained teachers, that we're not just putting social studies

teachers and English teachers that may or may not have ethnic studies training in those positions, and for curriculum development." As an organization that promotes critical pedagogy, democratic education, community and student activism, and self-determination, the Ethnic Studies Now campaign provided an effective platform for their teacher leadership and advocacy work to take hold and root.

Chicago Teachers Union (CTU)

CTU works primarily at the district level. In recent years, CTU has championed against school closures and partnered closely with communities in their policy and advocacy efforts. Through its push to stop school closures, limit unmonitored charter school growth, and decrease class sizes, CTU believes it has made significant impacts. According to one

³ AB 2016, signed into law in California on September 13, 2016, establishes model ethnic studies curriculum for all schools in the state.

member, CTU's work "really demonstrate[d] the racial injustice of school closings and . . . the mayor has had to put a moratorium on closings as a result." In addition, "Being able to bargain around class size again was a huge accomplishment." CTU does not see its leadership and advocacy as solely limited to within schools. In fact, their 2015 report, *A Just Chicago: Fighting for the City Our Students Deserve*, makes it clear that CTU is concerned with the broader social and civic fabric of the city. Speaking about CTU's organizing work, one member reflected,

I think it makes [teachers] more active and it also changes their views on the world and how things are run. It gets them more involved in politics. During our mayoral election and other city council elections a couple years ago we had so many teachers active and probably teachers that didn't even vote before or weren't active at all were campaigning, and we got a teacher elected to city council, we got the mayor in a runoff election for the first time in history in Chicago. So I just think it makes people overall more active, not only within their schools but in the community and in civic life.

Teachers Unite (TU)

TU's work focuses locally, within its New York City home. While broadly interested in democratizing the teachers' union, TU uses school-based organizing to build leadership and capacity of teachers to advocate and act for educational justice. TU's major

focus area has been the institution of restorative justice practices, and the organization has forged ties with other community partners to address this issue. TU views restorative justice as an entry point into broader social justice policy work. As one TU member explained,

We're not about supporting educators to learn restorative justice as a classroom management technique. We believe that it's part of a larger resistance to racist policies and practices and that it needs to be connected in that way – as active resistance to the school-to-prison pipeline, as active resistance to incarceration.

In a national context, TU is the only teacher-led organization to be part of the Dignity in Schools Campaign (DSC), which promotes positive approaches to school discipline. With other local DSC partners, TU has accomplished district-wide policy wins related to the student discipline code and the limitation of suspensions. In addition, along with its DSC partners, TU has helped win financial resources to support schools to be part of a district-wide Restorative Justice Pilot Program. Through the program, schools receive funds to hire restorative justice coordinators and to support staff professional development.

There are a wide variety of ways in which TLA organizations work to influence education policy around an array of important issues. Operating at national, state, and district levels, TLA organizations are able to leverage the

expertise and knowledge of teachers to initiate conversations focused on transforming schools and systems into more equitable and just environments. As a result, schools and communities can benefit from better-informed and crafted policy *and* more effective implementation. The diversity of collective teacher leadership and advocacy efforts we have captured here can inform the field with regard to how best to leverage the work of TLA organizations from across the spectrum of form and function.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers are critical stakeholders in our educational system. We rely on teachers, who engage directly with students, to ensure that the learning needs of students are met. But while teachers can often direct what happens within their classroom, teachers are seldom provided the opportunity to assert influence outside of that realm and it seems their voice is almost completely lost in the education policy context. However, the circumstances we describe are not without remedy. There are a wide variety of TLA organizations that work hard to support teachers as leaders and advocates for education policies that can effectively contribute to improved schools, communities, and student outcomes. The recommendations that follow lay out some key considerations for funders and education intermediaries to keep in mind when thinking about how teachers' expertise and knowledge can be leveraged to inform education policy. This set of recommendations also contributes to the sense that teachers' professional status must be elevated if we are serious

about creating schools and systems that best meet the needs of students, families, and communities.

Equity and social justice

While all the organizations engaged in our study described themselves as focusing on educational equity, we detected a difference in the ways in which their approaches implicated broader issues and analyses of social justice. In its most basic interpretation, equity goals focused on the elevation of teachers as professionals in order to improve teaching and learning to achieve better student outcomes. This interpretation includes a basic understanding of education as an important vehicle for equity by focusing on the needs of more disadvantaged communities and students. By focusing on the professional growth and efficacy of teachers, this vision of equity will improve student outcomes.

However, some TLA organizations consistently talk about their work in stronger alignment with students, families, and communities. Each of

these organizations articulates broader, bigger goals around social, political, and economic transformation that move the purpose of their work outside of an exclusive focus on classrooms, teachers, schools, and even education. While the primary setting for their work is in the sphere of public schools and education, their goals tend to be about broader democratic values and systems, social and economic justice for whole communities, and self-determination for communities of color. The nuanced difference between these goals of equity and social justice turns on understanding public schools and education as central to bigger projects of social, political, and economic systems transformation, versus education as a tool for equity and social mobility within current systems.

Teacher preparation and professional development

Professional development and support was deemed critical by all study participants. Participants acknowledged that policy advocacy entails particular skills that teachers are not

traditionally supported to develop. Participants shared ideas that would support teachers in advocacy skill development over time, starting from teacher preparation programs and continuing through in-service professional development. Connected to the identification of the need for teacher support and development is the belief that policy work should be considered as integral to the job of teaching. Because teachers' jobs are inherently connected to policy as interpreters, arbiters, and implementers, it is logical to support their professional identities, training, and development in kind. The expectation that teachers contribute to and critique education policy as part of their jobs would also create a professional atmosphere that would lessen the fear of retribution that participants identified as a current barrier to teacher leadership, advocacy, and involvement in education policy.

Networks and professional learning communities

Due to the nature of teachers' jobs, which primarily confines them to single school sites for the entirety of their work day, participants widely named the importance of integrating education policy work into activities at schools. From organizing through school-based union chapters to including policy conversations alongside more common discussions of pedagogy and curricular content, participants made it clear that there should be ways for teachers to engage in policy work as part of their everyday school-based activities. TLA organizations all worked hard to break

down barriers between teachers so that they may work together on policy. Plus, a strength that they all shared was their capacity to connect teachers across classrooms, schools, and, in some cases, districts and states.

Teachers engaged in leadership and advocacy work appreciate the opportunity to build with one another, and the intentional networking of "like-minded" teachers who all fiercely advocate for educational equity is an important asset to leverage for broader educational change. Just as we know that breaking down barriers between classrooms can help teachers develop better curriculum and instructional strategies, we recommend the consideration of professional learning communities focused on TLA for education policy. There is no reason that the advantage of professional learning communities to support innovation among educators should be withheld from the policy-making

arena. While it is clear that various TLA organizations are engaged in supporting teachers to influence policy in myriad ways, we found little evidence that their efforts were cross-pollinating. Given the relatively nascent development of TLA work through organizations like the ones profiled in this study, we believe it is important to support knowledge, skill, and capacity development across them strategically.

Partnering with communities

In addition to breaking down barriers between teachers themselves, a successful strategy employed by some of the TLA organizations included in our study was to partner with community organizations and stakeholders. In supporting the growth and development of TLA, it is important to ensure that organizations seek to build connections between teachers, families, students, and community-



based advocacy and organizing groups. Just as learning does not only happen in the silo of a school building, policy should be informed and improved by leveraging the collective expertise of those stakeholders who are most affected. In the case of education, then, teachers, families, and students must work together to ensure policy agendas, processes, and outcomes that reflect their needs and interests. Based on our findings, it seems that locally based TLA organizations most effectively partner with local organizations and constituencies. Therefore, support should be directed at further leveraging and uplifting these more organic ties and/or supporting nationally based organizations to concentrate resources on developing authentic ties to the communities in which they work.

One of many

Improving the educational outcomes of all children requires a combination of policies and measures that work to improve the quality of schools that children attend and provide support to their families and to the communities in which they live. There is no silver bullet! Thus, it is important that strategies developed to support TLA are combined with or part of a broader set of actions that understand the contextual nature of this work. As important as teacher leadership and advocacy are, they will not be impactful without the combined efforts of other change strategies seeking to influence better outcomes for our nation's public schools.

This point also highlights that TLA is not a strategy that is issue-dependent or specific. In other words, as illustrated by the findings of our study, TLA can effectively focus on a wide variety of issues. The advantage of the strategy is not specific to any particular education issue, as no matter what one seeks to change in education, teachers and teacher expertise are a central factor. Thus, as discussed above, TLA is most effective when conducted in partnership with student and family leadership efforts. And, TLA should be considered an important pillar for the success of any given school reform du jour. In short, in isolation teachers cannot positively effect educational change and, conversely, very little can be effective without teachers being centrally engaged.

Talk must lead to action

Finally, as recognition of the value and importance of teacher leadership and advocacy within the policy arena begins to increase, participants are already experiencing the fatigue of talking about the need for such work, as opposed to seeing and feeling tangible action. One participant shared a frustration that she has had:

very similar conversations about all of these things with a lot of different groups, a lot of different stakeholders, a lot of organizations. And everybody always vehemently agrees that these things have to change. Teacher preparation programs have to change, teacher leadership pathways have to change, the way we look at social justice and equity and

equality needs to change. But nothing's changing.

Another participant echoed these sentiments by saying, "I'm really frustrated that after three or four years in this world of leadership – that is amazing and wonderful and powerful – I'm still having the same exact conversations I did the first day that I started talking." The field is ready and teacher leaders are poised to move beyond the contemplation and conversation about whether teacher leadership and advocacy for education policy is a strategic lever for change to action that enables their expertise to shine light on policy solutions for our nation's public schools.

LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS

Case Profiles

Association of Raza Educators (ARE)

The Association of Raza Educators (ARE) was founded in 1994 in response to California's Proposition 187, which aimed to deny social services, healthcare, and education to undocumented immigrants. With chapters located throughout California, ARE is composed of educators, university professors, students, and community allies. The organization describes itself as working to advance critical social and political consciousness as well as Raza liberation. Their objectives and principles are as follows:

- Promote critical pedagogy as the principle means of addressing the question of how to teach our children;
- Struggle for democratic education, where the parents and community have the same rights as teachers, counselors, and administrators in the education of their children;
- Promote community activism among teachers;

- Nurture student activism and develop student activists;
- Struggle to reclaim spaces in the institution (i.e., schools) for progressive education and to develop politically active teachers.

These objectives and principles provide a rationale for their efforts to expand the ethnic studies curriculum across California districts and schools, and their provision of workshops. The praxis professional development series are seen as spaces that are “for social justice educators by social justice educators.” Within these sessions participants learn how to deliver culturally relevant curriculum with a critical pedagogical lens that advances an ethnic studies curriculum. ARE also sponsors an annual statewide conference to convene diverse educational stakeholders.

ARE has advanced successful campaigns: Hispanic Scholarship Foundation opened their funds to undocumented students; defense of teachers from unjust discipline; partnerships with parents to eject racist administrators; raising funds for schol-

arships for undocumented students; ethnic studies approved as a graduation requirement in multiple school districts.

ARE is membership driven, and teachers connect with each other through regular meetings and online spaces. ARE aims to create a space where teachers can engage in advocacy at differing levels. As one member explains,

I find that as soon as you wake people up, it's just a point of finding their comfort zone. . . . You have to be the model, you have to be the example. When I'm calling a politician, I call them right in the faculty room. I want everybody to hear what I'm saying, because I want them to make the same phone calls. People have lives, people don't live activism the way we live activism, so you have to fit it in a way that they can do easily.

More information about ARE can be found at:

<http://aresandiego.weebly.com/our-story.html> and
<https://arelosangeles.wordpress.com/>

Badass Teachers Association (BATs)

Created in 2013, the Badass Teachers Association (BATs) is a national organization with members located across the United States. BATs claims to be “for every teacher who refuses to be blamed for the failure of our society to erase poverty and inequality, and refuses to accept assessments, tests, and evaluations imposed by those who have contempt for real teaching and learning.”⁴

BATs is membership driven and grassroots. There is an overarching BATs mission that includes a rejection of profit-driven education reform, a demand for equitable school-driven practices, academic freedom for educators, a student-centered curriculum, the elimination of standardized testing, school cultures rooted in equitable practices, and democratically elected school boards, with each state and locality establishing its own goals and actions.

BATs has a strong network of members across the country that connect using social media and other online forums to stay informed and connected about critical education policy issues. The organization has a Facebook page with over 64,000 members and a Twitter feed, website, blog, and extensive email listserv. Special interest Facebook groups allow

teachers to “chat” about their areas of interest or expertise. As one member shared, one of the greatest benefits of membership is learning from educators across the country:

I’m in Washington, and I have fellow BATs in Florida, in New York, in Texas, in California, all around. Because we’re all networks now, we’re hearing what’s going on. I was just reading an article that a friend of mine sent me from Missouri where there’s a new law where elementary students, if they get in a fight, could [serve] four years of prison time, making it a felony.

BATs members engage in policy through a range of activities. BATs teachers engage in organized collective actions such as phone calls, letter writing, and emails. Members present at conferences, write blogs and op-eds, and engage in organized protests and events. Some members run for elected office and testify in public spaces. However, BATs makes clear that teachers do not have to serve in formal roles to be seen as leaders – BATs aims to recognize the leadership of all classroom teachers and ensure their collective voice is heard. As one member shared, it is critical for teachers to be able to remain in the classroom and be leaders in advocacy and policy:

Teachers aren’t able to serve in [formal] roles. . . . Teachers can’t serve on school boards or in different positions. Of course they could if they quit their job. . . . I think they should change policy around teachers being able to serve in certain positions. If I’m willing to do my job all day and volunteer or put myself in a position to serve as a role model

or a board member then I should have the opportunity to do so if my time will allow it.

More information about BATs can be found at

<http://www.badassteacher.org/>

Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ)

What I think makes CTQ a bit different . . . is how do we build systems where the expectation and the opportunity is for every teacher to lead, not just a select few. (CTQ Interviewee)

The Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ) is a national nonprofit, established in 1998, that aims to improve public education by tapping into the “bold ideas and expert practices of teachers.”⁵ CTQ does so by going “beyond teacher voice and engagement to cultivate teachers’ active leadership in order to develop innovative ways to improve teaching and learning.”⁶

To elevate teacher voice CTQ has paved a number of different avenues, including the creation of a virtual community of teacher leaders (the Teacher Leaders Network), a weekly column in *Education Week*, blogs, and “TeacherSolutions” teams – expert teachers who come together to synthesize and analyze research, apply their pedagogical knowledge and expertise, and generate policy recommendations. CTQ also provides support to the Teacher Leader Network by hiring members to serve as “Virtual Community Organizers” (VCOs). Using a CTQ-developed curriculum, VCOs engage other teacher leaders in

⁴ See <http://www.badassteacher.org/>

⁵ See <https://www.teachingquality.org/about>

⁶ See <http://www.boldapproach.org/center-for-teaching-quality-ctq-teacher-leadership/>

online discussions, learning, and action. CTQ also supports “teacherpreneurs” – teachers who spend part of their day in the classroom and the remainder of their day leading local, state, and national efforts.

Most teachers engage with CTQ through the CTQ Collaboratory. The Collaboratory comprises more than 9,500 members and provides an important space, beyond the classroom, to “connect” with other educators. Members indicated that the community enabled them to activate the “change agent spark” that drew them to “education in the first place.” As one CTQ teacher leader shared,

There was a time when you could just be an excellent teacher and have that impact with your 25, 30 students. . . . I just don’t think that is the job anymore. . . . It’s bigger than that if we really are serious about equitable public school for all kids.

CTQ also provides an important space for teacher leaders to share their stories of impact. Through articles, blogs, and book chapters, teacher leaders are able to spread their influence beyond their networks. The idea is that when other teachers hear these stories and see these models, they will be able to envision a new way of operating. CTQ harnesses the *collective* influence of teacher leaders to advocate for school, district, state, and national policies and practices that support teacher leadership.

To tinker with one aspect of the system does not change the system. It changes the classroom for those kids and that teacher, and that will never have a long-term impact on education for all kids. What I loved

about CTQ was that . . . it was possible to have a larger group of people working in the same direction with the same focus on finding a way, from inside the system, to change the system so that it made more sense, not just for my kids in my classroom but for all kids.

More information about CTQ can be found at

<https://www.teachingquality.org/>

Chicago Teachers Union (CTU)

Chartered in 1937, the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) represents teachers, paraprofessionals, and clinicians within the Chicago Public School system (CPS). CTU currently has more than 30,000 members. CTU has adopted a model wherein the union is seen as a social movement. Members no longer see the union as an organization that exists solely to solve their workplace problems, but also as key in identifying and tackling issues through organizing and action. Since 2010, the CTU has made the collective activity of members the core of the union. The role of union leadership has been to support, facilitate, and activate teacher voice.

According to members, the primary goal of the union is to work to create quality schools and positive learning experiences for all students through the collective leadership and advocacy of all teachers. In 2012, CTU’s new research division conducted research that resulted in a published report, *The Schools Chicago’s Students Deserve*, which identifies what is needed to produce educational outcomes that support students’ lifelong success. To achieve the goals articulated in the

report, one CTU member shared that “it’s imperative for teachers to understand what is impacting their classroom and their day-to-day.” The member goes on to say that it is critical that teachers become “more active stakeholders in that process of shaping it to be something beneficial for their careers and their students.” According to one CTU leader, this is accomplished through organizing conversations at the school site and starting with the issues that members are most concerned with. The work, therefore, not only must appeal to the broader membership, it must also represent their needs.

I think you have to identify . . . what is going on in their schools and with their classrooms, and then . . . strategically target what is an issue or a cause of frustration for them, and then lead them through a conversation to a particular root cause. And it typically is in policy and identifying that particular agent of change and how they are responsible. And then giving them a vision in which you could have a chance in that policy and the belief in collective action and collective power of numerous voices united versus just one, but that one being imperative to the numerous or the collective.

CTU accomplishes its goals with the help of allies such as families and students and through workplace and community organizing. CTU also relies on the natural relationships teachers build with families and community partners to create solidarity among stakeholders. This enables CTU members, families, and community members to deepen their

understanding of the issues that must be addressed to improve the educational outcomes of students. *The Schools Chicago's Students Deserve*, for example, served not only as the basis of a number of bargaining proposals, but also as an important organizing tool for union members, families, and community partners. The publication helped generate the widespread support that the CTU experienced during their 2012 strike. Further, CTU has grounded its efforts in the neighborhoods and communities affected, giving voice to teachers and underserved communities. Indeed, CTU's current strategy is built on understanding local needs and using those forces to create change district-wide.

More information about CTU can be found at <https://www.ctunet.com/>

Educators for Excellence (E4E)

I think there is a little bit of trauma that comes from not having a voice and feeling like a subject and not an agent of reform, and so that training is hugely important for them to also psychologically realize, “Wow, yeah, I do know stuff and I do have thoughts,” so training is hugely important for community building, for capacity, and for effectiveness of their advocacy execution. (E4E Interviewee)

Founded in 2010, Educators for Excellence (E4E) is a national teacher leadership organization that champions better outcomes for students and the elevation and prestige of the teacher profession. The organization has a growing membership of 28,000 teachers united around a common set of values and principles. Members work together to identify issues that

impact their schools, create solutions to these challenges, and advocate for policies and programs that give all students access to a quality education. With chapters in New York City, Boston, Los Angeles, Minnesota, Connecticut, and Chicago, E4E ensures that teachers have a voice in the policies that impact their students and profession at the national, state, district, union, and school levels.

E4E members can engage with E4E through a variety of volunteer activities, including leadership trainings, policy teams, and advocacy campaigns. As members increase their engagement with E4E over time, they can become “Teacher Leaders,” taking on responsibility for guiding, managing, and developing a school-based team of E4E members. Members and Teacher Leaders are supported by E4E's full-time, paid outreach team, all of whom are former teachers themselves; these staff provide direct support to teachers by meeting them in person and via phone, email, and social media platforms. Additional paid staff members comprise an extensive network of professionals across a range of roles, including co-CEOs; operations associates; and organizing, data, and communications managers.

E4E drives change by building a movement of teachers, identifying and training teacher leaders, creating policy recommendations, advocating for the implementation of their recommendations, and bringing this process to scale. Organized locally, teachers connect with like-minded teachers to identify challenges and drive solutions. The Teacher Policy Team Program – in which a group of



teachers reviews research around an education policy issue, deepens their knowledge by speaking with and surveying peers, and crafts policy recommendations – is one example of how E4E members develop and sharpen skills that are conducive to advocacy.

Once we've narrowed down to one solution, [we ask], who are the decision-makers? Who are the players in the field? Where would they fall on a decision like this? We take teachers through that process so that they can start to understand how things sit in the political sphere, and who they need to move in order to get what they want. . . . Those trainings can dovetail into trainings of how to sit down with an elected official, and they can ask how to testify. . . . How do you go to one of those [hearings], and do your three-minute testimony in a way that moves people?

By having a seat at the table with stakeholders and taking action, E4E members are able to share their expertise and advocate for policy recommendations.

More information about E4E can be found at www.e4e.org.

Teachers Unite (TU)

Teachers Unite (TU) is a New York City-based nonprofit teacher leadership organization. Founded in 2006, TU works to transform schools into democratic and inclusive places by building power through union participation, organizing, and transformative/restorative justice approaches. TU works with coalitions to call for the end of racist disciplinary policies in schools and the implementation of

policies that invest in the safety and dignity of all students. As students, families, and teachers are inherently connected and necessarily allied stakeholder groups in education, TU works in concert with these groups to build school-based and system-wide advocacy.

TU comprises teacher, parent, and student members, an organizing council, and staff. Members pay dues based on income and agree to TU's Principles of Unity. The organizing council consists of teachers who take on leadership roles such as building partnerships with schools, conducting restorative justice workshops, and developing and evaluating strategies for achieving TU's mission and goals.

TU's work is guided by transformative justice principles which include: collaborative leadership; collective action; community accountability; resistance to unjust institutions; democracy; respect for all voices; and transformation through struggle.

TU builds power at the school site by growing restorative/transformational justice in schools. This is achieved by providing peer-to-peer professional development and developing school partnerships that engage school community members and stakeholders, develop collaborative leadership and decision-making skills, and encourage sustainable organizing and advocacy at the school level. By developing partnerships and implementing trainings, TU endeavors to transform schools into places that embody transformative justice through its practices.

We put out Growing Fairness, our documentary, and our online toolkit, as well as offer ourselves as we would

dispatch members to schools that would request help. Our members would be ostensibly coaching how to shift school climate and do restorative circles and the like. The implicit agenda is that this isn't just saying, "Okay, here is a circle. Bye." It's, "Okay, who in your school is going to commit to this? Develop a restorative justice team? Who are your allies? . . . What are the obstacles? What is the specific need? What is your action plan?" So, really organizing is the way to do the school democracy.

In addition to implementing workshops and partnerships, members of TU advocate for education policy by writing op-eds and blog posts, building relationships with other educators, and influencing funders and decision-makers. Coalition building is another key strategy that TU employs to build power and influence education policy. For example, TU worked collaboratively with the Student Safety Coalition to get the Student Safety Act and its amendments passed. In addition, TU members serve on the steering committee of Dignity in Schools Campaign (DSC) to reduce suspensions, and advocate for positive disciplinary practices in schools. Along with DSC, TU developed blueprints for restorative justice policies and practices that were piloted in 12 New York City public schools.

More information about TU can be found at www.teachersunite.org.

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Data for this qualitative study were collected in three phases: through informational interviews, a convening of teachers, and case profiles.

Informational interviews

Informational interviews were conducted with key leaders in the education field from 18 identified teacher leader organizations located across the nation. Using a snowball sampling methodology, we interviewed leaders from teacher leader organizations we were familiar with and asked interviewees for the names of other organizations and/or efforts engaged in promoting and supporting teacher leadership and advocacy. Through this methodology we conducted a total of 21 interviews with 27 participants. Interviews were completed over the phone and ranged from 30 minutes to an hour. Organizations represented included: Alliance to Reclaim our Schools, American Federation of Teachers, Association of Raza Educators, Badass Teachers Association, Boston Teachers Union, Center for Public Democracy, Center for Teaching Quality, Chicago Teachers Union, Coalition for Community Schools, EduColor, Educators for Excellence, Education Leaders of Color, Hope Street Group, Massachusetts Teachers Union, Teach Strong, Teach Plus, Teachers Unite, and United Teachers Los Angeles.

Teacher convening

A two-day convening of teachers was held in April 2017 in Chicago, Illinois. The purpose of the convening was to gain knowledge and perspective from classroom teachers who are involved in teacher leadership and advocacy for education policy that is expressly focused on educational equity and racial and economic justice.

To recruit participants, the research team contacted leaders from organizations that took part in the informational interviews plus a handful of others and requested three nominations of classroom teachers who were affiliated with each organization's work through leadership and/or membership. Based on nominations, the research team invited participants to ensure representation of a wide range of interests, backgrounds, experiences, and organization type.

Twenty educators attended the convening. Teachers received a small stipend for their participation. The research team facilitated a series of conversations and activities that explored how and why teachers engage in leadership and advocacy for education policy. Sessions were video and audio recorded, and notes were taken. Participants came from 18 school districts, 13 states, and 14 organizations. Organizations represented at the two-day convening

included: Association of Raza Educators; Badass Teachers Association; Center for Teaching Quality; Chicago Teachers Union; EduColor; Educators for Excellence; Education Leaders of Color; Hope Street Group; Jefferson Federation of Teachers; Latinos for Education; Padres y Jóvenes Unidos; Teaching Tolerance; TeachPlus; and the U.S. Department of Education.

TLA site selection

Based on information gathered through the informational interviews, six organizations were selected to better understand how teachers engage in policy leadership and advocacy. The researchers developed a criterion for selecting sites for the study. Sites were selected from a sample across the U.S. and represented organizations working on educational policy in local, state, and/or national contexts. All organizations selected for participation prioritized the membership of classroom teachers and aimed to lift the voices of their membership in setting the policy advocacy agenda. Additionally, we selected sites that explicitly claim an equity and social justice agenda.

Organizations selected used diverse methods of policy advocacy, including but not limited to: organization advocacy, labor union organizing, social media, grassroots activism, and professional development.

The research team developed a semi-structured interview protocol based on the literature and the research questions. In spring 2017, we conducted one-on-one interviews with 33 participants across the six sites (see Figure 2).⁷ Interviewees included organizational staff, teacher leaders, and other key organizational stakeholders. Interviewees shared their perspectives on teacher advocacy and policymaking; the range of roles teachers can assume; supports required; the outcomes and impact of identified efforts; and challenges.

To increase our familiarity with identified organizations and collect contextual information the research team conducted interviews at sites or locations that were convenient for participants. Researchers conducted phone interview if meeting in person was not possible due to scheduling conflicts or

travel. All interviews were audio recorded and documented. Interviews ranged from 45 minutes to two hours. Researchers wrote reflective memos after each interview in order to capture immediate conceptual ideas and to assist in the subsequent analysis by recording meanings derived from the data. We also collected organizational data and available background materials, and reviewed organizational websites and contextual information to document past and current efforts to lift teacher voice and advocacy in influencing educational policy.

Data analysis

Individual interviews were transcribed from audio recordings for data analysis. Transcripts were coded using Dedoose, a mixed-methods analysis software. The coding schema for analysis was created using the overlying research questions for the TLA study. Codes also emerged during data analysis. Throughout the data analysis process, analytic memos were written by research team members to discuss data analysis collectively and calibrate our coding. Team members discussed coding schema, coded the same transcript, and compared coding on first round of transcripts to ensure similar coding. The research team also met on a weekly basis to discuss emerging codes and themes to support inter-rater reliability. Once coding was completed emerging themes were discussed and drafted into memos. This report is based on these analyses.

⁷ One interview conducted by the research team consisted of two interviewees.

FIGURE 2 Number of Case Profile Interviewees

Organization	Number of Interviewees
Association of Raza Educators	5
Badass Teachers Association	6
Center for Teaching Quality	4
Chicago Teachers Union	5
Educators for Excellence	7
Teachers Unite	5
TOTAL INTERVIEWS	32

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