



Annenberg Institute
BROWN UNIVERSITY

The Chicago Teacher Leadership Project

A research–practice partnership strengthening
teacher leadership across Chicago Public Schools

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NEW
TEACHER
CENTER



TEACH
+PLUS



Teacher Leadership

Teacher leadership – formal roles where teachers mentor peers, coach instruction, guide curriculum, shape school culture, and/or inform school and district policy – is widely seen as a key lever for improving schools. Chicago Public Schools and organizations working within the district have been at the forefront nationally in leveraging teacher leadership to support teacher career development and instructional improvement district-wide. However, how teacher leadership plays out in practice and the impacts of teacher leadership on teachers and students are not well understood, both in Chicago and across the country.

The Chicago Teacher Leadership Project is a multi-year research-practice partnership working to understand how teacher leadership takes shape across Chicago, what conditions help it thrive, and how it affects instruction and student outcomes.

Convened by RPPL, the project brings a district, six professional learning organizations, and a research team together in a shared Community of Practice to learn together and build a lasting evidence base.

Who's Involved

Chicago Public Schools (CPS), the nation's fourth-largest school district, is the project's district partner, collaborating on data, research, and district-wide learning about teacher leadership. CPS offers many formal opportunities for teacher leadership roles in schools.

Six professional learning organizations join CPS to form the project's Community of Practice, each supporting teacher leaders in the district and bringing distinct approaches to developing teacher leaders:

1. [Leading Educators](#)
2. [New Teacher Center](#)
3. [Teachers Supporting Teachers](#)
4. [Teach For America](#)
5. [Teaching Lab](#)
6. [TeachPlus](#)

RPPL and the Annenberg Institute at Brown University lead the research and facilitation. RPPL is a national collaborative of professional learning organizations, researchers, district and system leaders, and funders advancing what works in teacher PL. The Annenberg Institute at Brown houses its core research team.

Supporters of the Chicago Teacher Leadership include the following funders:

1. Crown Family Philanthropies
2. Lloyd A. Fry Foundation
3. McDougal Family Foundation
4. Square One Foundation
5. Vivo Foundation

We welcome introductions to new funders and partners who share our commitment to strengthening teaching in Chicago.



Year 1 (SY25–26): Building the Foundation

In its first year, the partnership built the infrastructure and relationships needed for rigorous, long-term research:

- **Established the Community of Practice:** We convened the organizations and CPS in a Community of Practice, setting up structures for regular meetings, understanding one another's work, setting a shared vision, and building a research infrastructure to support our ongoing efforts.
- **Mapped teacher leadership across the district:** We developed an initial landscape analysis and a shared theory of action describing where and how teacher leadership happens across CPS.
- **Listened to educators:** We conducted a pilot interview study with teachers, school leaders, and PL providers to understand why and how they engage in teacher leadership.
- **Created shared measures:** We reached consensus on common constructs and piloted survey tools so organizations and the district can measure progress in the same way.

Community of Practice Impact

- ✓ 100% of partner organizations agreed the Community of Practice was a valuable use of their time.
- ✓ Every partner organization identified gaps in how they measure teacher leadership.
- ✓ 5 of 6 organizations plan to adopt at least one new shared measure aligned to their program model.



Early Insights from Year 1

The initial Year 1 landscape analysis* surfaced a system of teacher leadership in CPS that is widespread but unevenly distributed:

- Schools average about **3 teacher leaders**, but **7%** have none, and **5%** have eight or more.
- Schools serving more economically disadvantaged students and with lower academic performance tend to have **more teacher leaders**, on average.
- Schools with **no teacher leaders** tend to have **fewer teachers** and **smaller shares** of English Learners and students with disabilities — raising important questions about equity and support.

The pilot interview study* that included 19 teacher leaders, school leaders, and district and PL organization leaders across a range of roles surfaced how teacher leaders experience the work:

- **Principals are the linchpin:** Nearly every teacher leader traced their path into leadership to a direct conversation with their principal, whose encouragement gave them the validation and confidence to step up.
- **Fulfilling but demanding:** Teacher leaders reported strong professional fulfillment and an intent to stay, valuing the chance to shape instruction while still teaching, even as many navigate “scope creep” and the risk of burnout.
- **Leading adults:** Teacher leaders see professional learning as critical because some struggle with the transition to facilitating adult learning and may lack confidence in using data to inform learning cycles they lead with teachers.
- **Support systems matter:** Teacher leaders valued a combination of content and skills-based PL and highlighted the importance of having the support of both their school administrators and a coach.

**Note: These initial findings rely on a subset of the full data that we expect to analyze in Years 2-3. Insights may shift.*

“I think the biggest thing is teachers feel like they have advocacy and they have expertise that is valued and heard.”

— Teacher leader, CPS pilot interview study



Looking Ahead to Years 2–3 (SY26–27 & SY27–28)

Over the next two years, the partnership will conduct a deep research study together and work to understand its impact on practice:

- **Deeper descriptive research:** We will expand interviews and landscape analysis across priority communities in CPS to capture the full landscape of teacher leadership.
- **Impact analysis:** We will conduct an impact analysis study of how teacher leadership affects instruction, student outcomes, and teachers' own careers and well-being.
- **Ongoing shared measurement:** The Community of Practice will define and broaden common measures, so all six PL partners can compare implementation data.
- **Meaning-making with partners:** Research-focused Community of Practice meetings and network convenings will turn emerging findings into actionable information and decisions for schools, organizations, and the district about teacher leadership.
- **Sharing beyond Chicago:** RPPL will share our findings widely through a national network of 175+ organizations and 40,000+ annual website visitors, reaching a large share of the field.