

# LEARNINGS FROM TRANSFORMING TEACHING PILOTS

*A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Launched in response to the rising stress and burnout among educators, the Transforming Teaching Pilot (TTP) initiative introduced new design principles to foster a more sustainable and equitable teaching profession. By partnering with national experts and local schools, TTP focused on enhancing workday flexibility, building professional trust, increasing specialization, and distributing responsibility to improve the social-emotional and academic outcomes of students. The results from the first year indicated progress, particularly in areas like Professional Trust and Shared Responsibility. Notably, experience in TTP varied by race of the teacher participant and also highlighted the need for continued support and alignment to truly redefine educator roles. Moving forward, CityBridge Education—now operating as CityTutor DC—plans to expand these efforts, integrating DC’s tutoring initiative to strengthen the talent pipeline and further refine team-based staffing strategies to support teachers and improve student outcomes across the city.

## **HISTORY AND BACKGROUND: WHY THIS AND WHY NOW?**

Since 2017, CityBridge Education has invested in teachers, leaders, and school teams with the ideas and drive to create new, better educational models for public schools in Washington, DC. CityBridge's Transforming Teaching Pilot (TTP) initiative emerged in fall 2021 as students and teachers began returning to school buildings after closures related to COVID-19. In addition to a rising teacher turnover rate, teachers reported high levels of stress and burnout, indicating that returning to the pre-pandemic "normal" was not sustainable. Robust local and national research suggested that the pain points for teachers – isolation, lack of respect, lack of growth opportunities, and a feeling of being ruled by the bell – were driving them out of the classroom, an exodus that, if it persisted, would ultimately reverse the remarkable progress that DC schools had made over the past 15 years.

The drawbacks of the profession are largely products of the *design* of the nearly ubiquitous “one teacher, one classroom” model of school. Over the last decade, we have steadily raised our expectations for what teachers should do for students without changing how their work is organized. They must facilitate rigorous academic learning, conduct trauma-informed, anti-racist, social-emotional learning; keep students safe in an increasingly dangerous environment; and coordinate data and communication for their class. We continue to hold a single classroom teacher – the teacher of record – accountable for a wide array of student outcomes. Additionally, the pervasive “one teacher, one classroom” model perpetuates inequity for our country's most marginalized students, blocking their access to opportunities for excellent teaching and learning. Furthermore, the stress, isolation, and lack of respect borne by all teachers fall more heavily on BIPOC educators, who are far too often asked to take on more than their fair share of work even as they are relegated to supporting roles with limited room for advancement.

In the spring of 2022, CityBridge articulated a new vision of teaching to a wide array of citywide leaders and practitioners. This new vision was founded on a set of design principles that would address the profession's endemic challenges and make it work better for its members and the students it served.

## **A BRIGHTER FUTURE: NEW DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR TEACHING**

Our new design principles envision a field where teachers share instructional responsibility across a team of educators and adults; have increased autonomy and decision-making power; can concentrate on the aspects of instruction and social-emotional development where they are strongest; and experience workday flexibility. With these shifts, DC's most critical resource – our educators – have the time, expertise, and support to make transformative and lasting change in the lives of their students.

Currently, the isolated teacher in a typical classroom hears directives from central office and the principal to raise student performance and is pressured to work harder. But in a profession organized more along the lines of these design principles, teachers could meet lofty goals by collaborating to work *smarter*. Schools could help meet the needs of the *whole child* while also treating teachers as *whole adults*.

### ISOLATED



### SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Teams of educators take on individual and collective accountability for promoting student learning and development through deep, mutually supportive collaboration.

### JACK-OF-ALL TRADES



### SPECIALIZATION

Educators concentrate on the aspects of instruction and social-emotional development where they are strongest and which students most need.

### UNDER RESPECTED



### PROFESSIONAL TRUST

Educators enjoy collective autonomy over key areas of teaching, learning, and operations agreed upon with school and system leaders.

### RULED BY THE BELL



### WORKDAY FLEXIBILITY

Educators gain greater control over their time to better attend to their own needs as well as those of their students.

To transform an entire profession so deeply rooted in how schools are structured is no small task. We enlisted national “Design Partners” who had already been engaged in this intensive work in other pockets of the country and whose approaches were broadly aligned with our design principles.

### Arizona State University Next Education Workforce

The Next Education Workforce approach means building **teams of educators**, each with specialized roles, and sharing responsibility for the learning and development of a **shared roster** of students across those teammates. The focus is on **teaming and distributed expertise** in order to better personalize learning for students.

#### Design Principles Emphasized:



SHARED RESPONSIBILITY



SPECIALIZATION

### Opportunity Culture

Opportunity Culture is an initiative to **extend the reach of the most effective teachers** by having them lead teams of other teachers in their school. These Multi-Classroom Leaders, or MCLs, directly manage teams of two to eight other teachers in the same grade or subject—including co-planning, co-teaching, coaching, and even modeling instruction in team members’ classrooms.

#### Design Principles Emphasized:



SHARED RESPONSIBILITY



SPECIALIZATION

### Teacher-Powered Schools

Teacher-powered schools are schools where **teachers exercise significant collective autonomy** over the school program, personnel, and school administration. Taking on these autonomies enables teachers to meet the individual needs of all their students.

#### Design Principles Emphasized:



PROFESSIONAL TRUST



SHARED RESPONSIBILITY



SPECIALIZATION

## TALENT PILOTS: WHAT DID WE TRY AND WHAT DID WE LEARN?

In the fall of 2022, CityBridge began a series of design workshops with representatives from a number of DC local education agencies (LEAs), including DCPS. School leaders and staff conducted empathy interviews to understand how their educators were specifically experiencing the challenges of the teaching profession. They honed problem statements and learned from representatives of each of the

Design Partners about how their solutions might address them. After further exploration in the spring of 2023, which in some instances included travel to see examples of Design Partner work in action, four LEAs ultimately decided to join the first TTP cohort, whose work would begin in earnest in school year 2023-24:

**Center City Public Charter Schools** partnered with Teacher-Powered Schools. Center City sought to provide more collective autonomy to their teachers to foster innovation and meet the needs of exceptional learners.

**Design Principles Highlights:**



**Key Action(s):**

- **Center City PCS - Brightwood** piloted a staffing model that allowed multiple educators to support almost every section of students throughout the school day. Middle school teachers were working together to distribute their collective expertise within and across classrooms, with a focus on supporting diverse learners.
- **Center City PCS - NoMa** piloted a flexible schedule with “Inspiration Stations” built into their day to give students access to more engaging extracurricular activities that are aligned to their core subjects and student-driven. They leveraged more educators and community partners while providing additional flexibility for teachers in how they use time.

**Promising Outcome(s):**

- Center City Brightwood drafted a “MergeTeaching” **playbook to enable more effective co-teaching**. It has been shared across TTP cohort participants.
- In 2024-25, Center City NoMa **planned to expand their “Inspiration Stations”** pilot to include more grades.

**District of Columbia Public Schools** partnered with ASU/Next Education Workforce. DCPS leadership recognized close alignment between this Design Partner’s approach and the Sixth Grade Academies (6GA) initiative in DCPS middle schools to overcome the challenges students face transitioning from elementary to middle school. DCPS also selected an elementary school that was working to better meet the needs of exceptional learners to join the pilot.

**Design Principles Highlights:**



**Key Action(s):**

- **Hart MS** piloted flexible schedules on Wednesdays in sixth grade in order to customize SEL and academic interventions for core content areas as well as provide teachers with an extended planning block.
- **Johnson MS** piloted collaborative planning meetings in sixth grade to institute shared practices across the grade-level team and distribute responsibility among instructional and non-instructional staff.

**Promising Outcome(s):**

- Students across all DCPS schools implementing TTP initiatives saw **improved sense of belonging markers** from spring 2023 to spring 2024.
- Across all DCPS middle schools implementing

- **Kramer MS** piloted flexible schedules on Mondays in sixth grade to establish extended planning blocks to institute shared practices across the grade-level team and distribute responsibility among instructional and non-instructional staff
- **Tubman ES** piloted a co-teaching model in Grades 1- 4 as a collaborative effort to implement Tier I strategies and share responsibility across the grade-level team.

instructional teaming initiatives, there was a **strong connection between instructional teaming and student sense of belonging.**

- In 2024-25, all DCPS pilot schools are **continuing their work** to build stronger instructional teams and implement flexible schedules to transform the role of teaching.

**Friendship Public Charter Schools** partnered with Opportunity Culture. Friendship sought to create pathways to leadership for excellent teachers that would not take them out of the classroom.

**Design Principles Highlights:**



**Key Action(s):**

- **Central office leaders** met regularly with Opportunity Culture consultants for support in crafting a new set of instructional roles, an initiative to extend the effective reach of the best teachers to more students.
- In January 2024, they launched “multi-classroom leaders” at three campuses inspired by Opportunity Culture’s model.

**Promising Outcome(s):**

- In 2024-25, Friendship PCS **launched a new classroom-based leadership role** to leverage and recognize their most successful educators, while keeping them in the classroom.

**DC Scholars Public Charter School** worked without a Design Partner and piloted team-based models in several grades in order to extend the reach of some of their strongest teachers. They redesigned their staffing structures to leverage associate teachers for intensive small group instruction and high-impact tutoring to better meet learner needs.

**Design Principles Highlighted:**



**Key Action(s):**

- **DC Scholars** piloted team-based models in K, 1st, 5th, 7th, and 8th grades. Their redesigned schedule allowed lead teachers and instructional coaches to lead whole-group instruction and leveraged associate teachers for small group instruction

**Promising Outcome(s):**

- In 2024-25, DC Scholars **planned to expand their instructional teaming pilot** to include more grade-levels.

→ **DC Scholars** leveraged internal staff and external partners to provide high-impact tutoring during the school day to distribute instructional responsibility across a team of adults.

→ In 2024-25, DC Scholars will continue to **leverage tutoring** to distribute instructional responsibility and lessen the burden on the teacher of record.

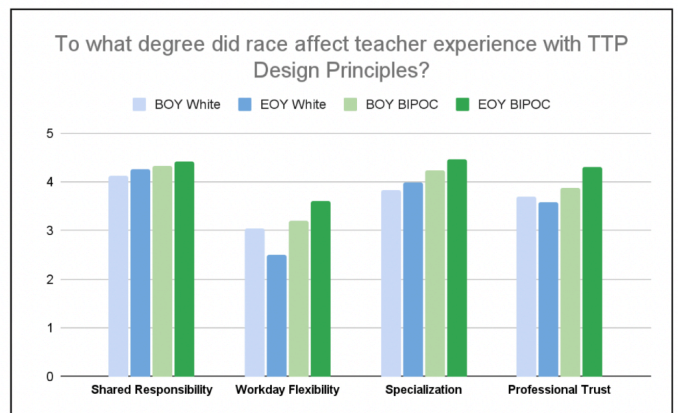
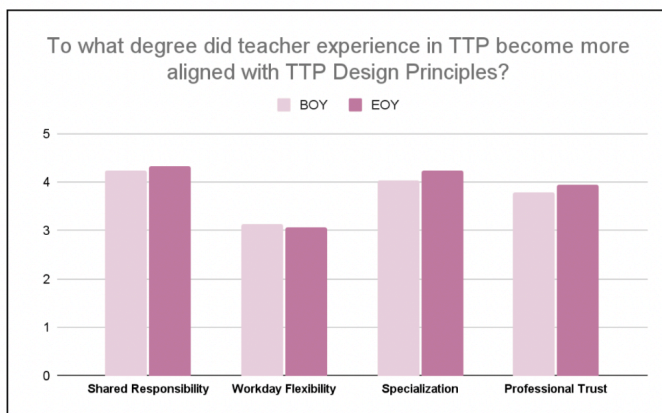
Overall, in their first year of implementation, TTP participants made progress toward their goals and gleaned important learnings for future citywide talent redesign support:

### 1. COMMUNITY, COALITION, AND COACHING ARE CRITICAL LEVERS FOR CHANGE

DC's education landscape is a complex ecosystem of stakeholders that require intentional coordination and organized collaboration to make meaningful citywide change. Through the newly articulated design principles along with citywide events, like the Teacher Summit and High-Impact Tutoring Summit, and ongoing Communities of Practice for TTP cohort participants, we grew a community of like-minded innovators moving towards common goals. Today, city leaders are more aligned in their vision of, and approach to, redesigning the teaching profession, with an increased focus on our design principles. Furthermore, TTP cohort participants reported that ongoing coaching and technical assistance from expert CityBridge staff helped participants stay focused on their talent goals and our third party support removed technical and logistical barriers.

### 2. TEACHER EXPERIENCE VARIED BY RACE

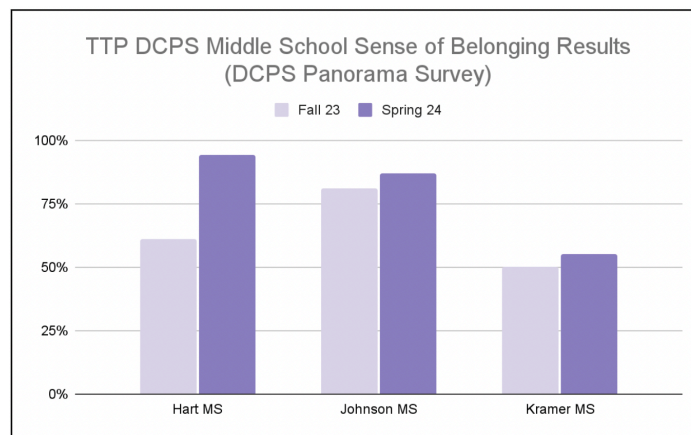
The results of a beginning and end-of-year survey of teachers participating in the pilots suggested that teachers felt that their work was moving modestly in the direction of the design principles, with Specialization and Professional Trust showing the most growth across all pilot participants. However, the survey revealed key differences in how teacher race impacted experience. BIPOC teachers participating in the pilots reported that they felt Professional Trust and Workday Flexibility expanded during the pilot year, while white teachers felt that they declined. We theorize that the difference between how these groups experienced the TTP initiative may be rooted in the unequal structure of the profession's status quo.



Note: BOY refers to Beginning of Year results and EOY refers to End of Year results on our TTP Design Principles Survey given to all teachers and leaders participating in the TTP initiative.  
BOY n-size = 38, EOY n-size = 40

### 3. INSTRUCTIONAL TEAMING AND SENSE OF BELONGING ARE CONNECTED

Two of the three DCPS middle schools in the TTP initiative ranked highest among the ten DCPS middle schools implementing Sixth Grade Academies, with students reporting feeling known and being part of their school communities. Notably, from Fall 2023 to Spring 2024, Hart Middle School's sense of belonging markers among their sixth grade students improved by over 30%. Feeling known by one's school community is predictive of other social-emotional and academic outcomes, and is particularly important for students making the transition from elementary to middle school. As teachers began to work in more functional teams, they could more regularly exchange information about students for whom they shared responsibility. This in turn strengthened teacher interaction with students, making it more personalized and responsive. Stronger teams of adults also increased the amount of attention students received from teachers during any given instructional period. It is also important to note the intersection of instructional teaming with tutoring initiatives in DC. Tutors – whether they are paraprofessionals, college students, or community members – when integrated into the instructional team, have the potential to bolster academic and social-emotional supports and lessen the burden on the teacher of record. All DCPS middle schools in the TTP cohort also implemented high-impact tutoring during the 2023-24 school year.



### 4. SYSTEM AND SCHOOL LEADER BUY-IN DRIVES PROGRESS

CityBridge found Transcend Education's [Five Conditions for Innovation Framework](#) to be valuable in thinking about school readiness to pilot approaches to transform teaching. In particular, LEA leaders must identify school leaders with conviction, who recognize that teaching as it is currently organized isn't working for students or teachers and are ready to roll up their sleeves. And those leaders ideally should have already rallied coalitions among their faculty and staff who are ready to prioritize distributed leadership. Pilot participants learned that the most effective distributed leadership sometimes requires new role creation and differentiated compensation. For example, Friendship PCS developed a new instructional leadership role during the pilot year, laying the groundwork for a team-based structure to launch in 2024-25. Additionally, larger LEAs – like DCPS – that empowered both leaders and teachers to own and drive this work, rather than keeping it in the central office, saw stronger student and teacher outcomes.

### 5. SEEING IS BELIEVING

CityBridge facilitated learning tours to other cities and across each TTP site locally, giving TTP leaders the opportunity to see talent innovation in action. Leaders reported that seeing various

design principles in action was transformative to their planning and implementation. Being able to see schools implementing innovative talent approaches, such as instruction teaming in Mesa, Arizona, served as something of an anchor for leaders that participated. Leaders reported that they had a clearer sense of where they are headed, what is possible, and what they are working towards. Similarly, local visits from cohort participants yielded more collaboration and alignment between TTP participants.

## **LOOKING AHEAD TO A BRIGHTER FUTURE: WHAT'S NEXT?**

CityBridge Education now operates as CityTutor DC. CityTutor DC will continue to support citywide efforts to redesign talent systems and the teaching role. Additionally, CityTutor DC will leverage our past work around tutoring and merge it with related talent initiatives. We view tutors as a critical component of instructional models as they have the potential to bolster academic and social-emotional supports and lessen the burden on the teacher of record. Furthermore, emerging data suggests that tutoring builds a diverse talent pipeline for schools, with local tutors entering into full-time teaching roles at impressive rates.

CityTutor DC will support innovation in talent systems across the District and encourages other champions and practitioners to take the following actions to improve outcomes for students and teachers:

### **ALIGN WORK TO NATIONAL RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE BASE**



Although local context matters greatly in the redesign of talent systems, it is critical to align local work to national research and findings. Through our work with national Design Partners, we ensured that our 2023-24 pilots were rooted in robust research and evidence. Recently, Brent Maddin, Executive Director of the Next Education Workforce at ASU, shared research suggesting educators working in team-based strategic school staffing models are more satisfied, have equal or lower turnover rates, and are more likely to recommend teaching as a career. Through our talent work, CityTutor DC is poised to distill national findings into local action.

### **PROVIDE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT**



Third-party support is essential for scaling talent initiatives effectively. Through intensive Design Sprint workshops, regular Communities of Practice, and other technical assistance, CityTutor DC will support LEAs and schools with an equity-centered approach to redesigning the teaching profession. Design Sprints are four-week-long intensive support to help school teams shift mindsets and build technical skills to support the implementation of talent interventions during the school day. Specifically, CityTutor DC is poised to support schools and LEAs with an equity-centered process for identifying talent needs and pain-points, drafting pilot and implementation launch plans, and ultimately sharing learnings with our broader coalition and audience.

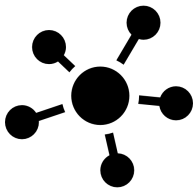


## FOCUS ON FLEXIBLE SCHEDULES AND STRONGER INSTRUCTIONAL TEAMS



With emerging indicators already pointing to promising teacher retention numbers in DC for the 2022-23 to 2023-24 school years, we know that student outcomes are predicated on teachers who are consistent, caring, relentless, and above all else respected and cared for. CityTutor DC is working towards a future where the teaching profession is more sustainable because of workday flexibility and new structures to support stronger instructional teams. These structures will give students wrap-around individualized support, beyond what one classroom teacher can provide. While all four design principles are still key to a redesign of the teaching profession, CityTutor DC intends to prioritize initiatives that implement flexible schedules to strengthen instructional teaming efforts and improve workday flexibility, as those have the strongest evidence base of improved outcomes for students and teachers.

## LEVERAGE A STRONG INTERMEDIARY



A decentralized school system demands a strong intermediary. Washington, DC consists of 70 autonomous LEAs, with little centralized coordination or operational support, each of which can decide how they will meet the challenge of responding to our talent crisis. CityTutor DC plays an important role by building support for transforming talent systems and coordinating a citywide approach that removes barriers to implementation and anchors in broad, national research. This approach has created a support network for LEAs and providers launching pilots and new initiatives.

## STRENGTHEN THE PIPELINE OF FUTURE TEACHERS



While we must redesign the current structures that make the “one teacher, one classroom” model of teaching unsustainable, we must also strengthen the pipeline of teachers entering the profession. Emerging data suggests that tutoring builds a diverse talent pipeline for schools, with local tutors entering into full-time teaching roles at impressive rates. Several District leaders have noted tutors help them counteract teacher vacancies and departures. Notably, DC school partners have recruited 20-25% of full-time AmeriCorps tutors as teachers and are encouraging college student tutors to stay post-graduation. CityTutor DC will leverage our role as the backbone of the tutoring ecosystem to build more formal pathways and non-traditional entry points into the teaching profession.

## CONCLUSION

Our work underscores the urgent need to rethink how we support educators and structure schools to better serve DC’s students. By centering our efforts on shared instructional responsibility, teacher autonomy and decision-making power, workday flexibility, and team-based approaches, we’ve made

tangible strides in building a more sustainable and equitable teaching profession in Washington, DC. The lessons learned over the past year have been significant: collaboration, alignment, stakeholder buy-in, and robust technical support are essential levers for change. Moving forward, CityTutor DC will continue to provide the strategic guidance needed for effective talent system redesign while integrating tutoring as a powerful tool for academic intervention and more robust instructional teams. We are committed to aligning our initiatives with national best practices, fostering citywide alignment, and scaling what works across DC's unique education landscape.

Our vision is clear: when DC educators are empowered, schools are more adaptive and students receive higher-quality, individualized support. This requires not only redesigning the current structures but also building a pipeline that attracts and retains talented educators who reflect the diversity of our city. As we carry this work forward, CityTutor DC will remain at the forefront, driving systemic change and ensuring that every student has access to a team of exceptional teachers who are dedicated, compassionate, resilient, and—above all else—well-supported and valued.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work would not be possible without the input and partnership of all members of our coalition working to catalyze high-impact tutoring and strategic staffing models to serve thousands of students. A special thanks the following organizations for supporting this pilot year:

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