

Community Impact Stories - Teach For America Indianapolis



Context

Over the last decade, Indianapolis (known as "Indy") has risen as a national leader on the front lines of innovation in P-12 education. More than any other urban city in the country, you find schools, communities, nonprofits, government, companies, and foundations working together towards a common mission of equity for our kids.

Collective action for educational equity is not only a result of the city's relational culture—but a moral imperative. By the time Indianapolis students are 10 years old, they are grade levels behind their more affluent suburban peers. Alarming, the graduation rate of low-income students and students of color in Indianapolis Public Schools is about 45 percent lower than that of peers in affluent suburban communities. Only 30 percent of Indianapolis students enroll in post-secondary education, and a mere 17 percent persist to their second year of study.

Fortunately, a movement for change is gaining momentum. And, as is true in any successful endeavor, wherever you see strong results, you find diverse coalitions of breakthrough leaders driving the effort. Teach For America has come to play an essential role as a primary source of leaders who expand opportunity for children from classrooms, schools, and every sector and field that shapes the broader systems in which schools operate.

Progress - Measurable progress over the past decade (Q1)

- **Improving outcomes and narrowing the gap at the state level** - Indiana's National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) were among the highest in the USA in 2019, and over the past ten years significant progress was made relative to other states while simultaneously narrowing opportunity gaps. Indiana students on average score higher in 4th and 8th grade math, reading, and science than public school students across the nation, having made significant progress relative to other states since 2007. For example, in 8th grade reading Indiana trailed 14 states in 2007, and now exceeds 39 states and trails only 2. At the same time, between 2007-2017, the White-Black 8th grade math achievement gap narrowed by 10 points, more than all other states except one, with similar progress in reading.
- **City of Indianapolis catching up with the state of Indiana** - The Indianapolis Public Schools district has eliminated the high school graduation gap with the state, seeing a 7% increase in post-secondary matriculation and a 33% decline in students requiring remedial coursework in college since 2011. A high-performing charter schools sector has encouraged the broader system of schools to improve. Mayor-sponsored charter schools have exceeded the state high school graduation rate and are demonstrating stronger learning growth and proficiency relative to IPS direct-run schools.

Drivers - Key drivers of progress (Q2)

1. Policy leadership that promotes the creation, thriving, and scaling of great schools

Over the past twenty years Indianapolis has seen policy change increasing the rigor of state learning standards and school accountability, evolutions in school governance, and the growth of a high-quality autonomous schools sector. These reforms, among others, built on each other and have collectively driven aggregate student progress at the state and city levels. They included:

- **Large-scale policy changes at the state level** - There are now rigorous learning standards and an accountability framework for schools, which have fostered a culture that more directly prioritizes student achievement and creates transparency of school and student performance for families and policy-makers.
- **A unified enrollment system** - The "Enroll Indy" system is across all public schools in the IPS geographic boundaries. Notably, Enroll Indy is physically located within IPS central office and has a governing board that is chaired by the Director of the Mayor's Office of Education Innovation, stewarding comprehensive school participation in unified enrollment. Parent choice has shaped the present system of public schools through their enrollment choices and direct advocacy, both at the statehouse and at school board meetings.
- **Creation of a thriving autonomous school sector** - In 2001, the state passed a high quality charter law granting the Indianapolis Mayor, a State Board, as well as school districts and universities authorization and governance rights over public charter schools, allowing for a new system of autonomous and accountable schools. The ensuing growth of charter schools in Indy - there are now 40 - stimulated parent and student choice and added pressure on the traditional school system to innovate and improve.

2. A broad and diverse coalition for change

The reforms central to Indianapolis' progress were brought about by an ecosystem of leaders contributing to, strengthening, and fueling the effort through talent, community and thought leadership, and investment. They are the result of decades of leadership by nonprofit community organizations, church and civic leaders, educators and parents, policy-makers and politicians across political lines, and committed philanthropists with steady and

sustained leadership over time. An Indianapolis movement—a collection of people and organizations—working to ensure that every child gets an excellent education has grown.

3. Political will and committed leadership

There is strong coordinated leadership between city leaders in the Mayor’s Office, Indianapolis Public Schools, central nonprofits like The Mind Trust, and civic leaders to sustain and accelerate progress. These organizations are aligned on schools as the unit of change and are willing to advocate for/allocate resources and provide each other cover in the face of political pressure. Today, Indianapolis Public Schools is recognized among a group of national leaders for pursuing bold and courageous change and innovation, namely through a revolution in the role of the central office as a source of supportive infrastructure and accountability versus the sole operator and manager of schools.

Contribution - Unique contribution (Q3)

1. [TFA as a Large, Diverse, and Growing Source of Leadership Talent for the Region](#) - Over the past ten years, TFA has become an essential source of diverse, student-centered and culturally-conscious leadership talent for a growing and thriving education reform movement in our community. There are over 700 alumni leading in schools, school systems, and every sector and field that shapes education. Nearly 40% of incoming TFA corps members now identify as people of color; we are the largest source of teachers of color to Indianapolis schools.
2. [TFA Teacher Impact On Student Achievement and Our School System Broadly](#) - At the classroom level, a growing body of evidence demonstrates the positive impact TFA teachers have on student achievement. We are the most studied teacher preparation organization in America today, and independent, rigorous research shows that TFA corps members and alumni are as effective—and in many instances more effective—in promoting student achievement compared with experienced teachers in the same schools. Today, TFA teachers are among the most sought after educators in the city.
3. [Retention of Talent In Our Community Over Time](#) - Today, TFA Indianapolis has distinguished itself as among the national leaders in retention of talent in the region overall and in education and fields impacting low-income students. Two years ago 65% of members stayed in Indianapolis for a third year, beyond a two-year commitment; last year, with a more targeted approach on our part, 71% of members did so putting us in the top decile in terms of third-year talent retention. Among TFA alumni locally, 74% work directly in education and 86% work in roles impacting education and low-income communities.
4. [TFA Alumni Leadership Impact Over Time](#) - It was a group of TFA alums, who began their careers in education through TFA in the 1990s, and sixteen others—that staffed the Tony Bennett administration, helping usher in the landmark education reforms described above. Jason Kloth served as our city’s first-and-only Deputy Mayor for Education, and two of the past three charter school directors in the Mayor’s Office of Education Innovation—Brandon Brown and Kristin Hines—and current Director, Patrick McAlister, are all TFA alums. There are 700 further alums working in leadership roles throughout the system, from CEOs of nonprofits to influential school and system leaders.

Chief Operating and Program Officer - Taylor Brown

Since serving as a 2008 corps member in St. Louis, Taylor has worked on Teach For America staff and led human capital strategy in a variety of capacities. Most recently, she led strategic recruitment and retention efforts for Indianapolis Public Schools, including talent pipeline development, teacher leadership and career pathways, school leader competency development, evaluation and compensation strategy. Taylor holds a Bachelor's in Communications from Vanderbilt University, Master of Arts in Teaching from the University of Missouri –St. Louis, and was a 2017 Emerging Human Capital Leader Fellow with Education Pioneers.

Originally from a small town in western North Carolina, she's lived in Indianapolis and worked in Indianapolis education for past 11 years. She and her husband, Brandon Brown, fellow 2008 Teach For America St. Louis Alum and Indy education leader, are proud parents of Davis (7) and Owen (5).



Executive Director - Amar Patel

A native Hoosier, Amar started his career in education as a Teach For America Chicago-Northwest Indiana corps member in 2007. He taught high school chemistry and biology and coached baseball at Wells Academy High School in Chicago. As Executive Director of TFA Indianapolis, Amar sets organizational vision and direction, supporting the impact of over 700 TFA program members on thousands of Indianapolis students and our city more broadly. Prior to assuming the role of Executive Director, he served as a member of the TFA Chicago-Northwest Indiana team, including as Head of Development for five years.

