

TEACHERS LEAD CHICAGO

CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS' FORMAL
TEACHER LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

A SNAPSHOT

JUNE 2025





“Being a
teacher leader
has enhanced
my own sense
of purpose and
commitment
to education.”

Rosario Canizales

New Teacher Mentor

Maria Saucedo STEAM Magnet Academy

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INTRODUCTION

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is taking a bold step in redefining teacher leadership with *Teachers Lead Chicago*, a groundbreaking initiative that creates structured career pathways for educators to grow their leadership skills.

As part of the district's *Lead with CPS* leadership development strategy, this program supports and compensates teachers in formal leadership roles, empowering them to drive instructional excellence, mentor new educators, and foster collaborative school environments.

By prioritizing teacher-led leadership, CPS aims to enhance teacher retention, strengthen instructional quality, and ultimately improve student outcomes. This case study explores the evolution, impact, and future of *Teachers Lead Chicago*, highlighting the voices of educators who are shaping the next generation of CPS classrooms.

This case study was developed collaboratively by the CPS Talent Office and the Office of Teaching and Learning in Spring 2025.

OVERVIEW:

A DISTRICT-WIDE APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Lead with CPS is a pioneering initiative by Chicago Public Schools (CPS) designed to foster greater transparency, equity, and access to career pathways for staff across the city.



CPS is currently the nation's fourth largest school district, serving more than 325,000 students, and one of the largest employers in Illinois with more than 45,000 staff across more than 600 schools and district offices as of the 2024-25 school year.

Initially launched in 2019 and re-imagined in 2023, *Lead with CPS* is among the nation's most comprehensive school district leadership development strategies to date, with dedicated programs and opportunities for employees districtwide – engaging thousands of staff in programs in a given year.

Historically, professional development programs varied across CPS, offering uneven levels of support depending on staff roles and locations. Today, this unified initiative brings nearly all employees under its umbrella, offering an array of formalized and supported opportunities designed to foster long-term career growth. Staff across the city can participate in a robust set of professional and leadership development opportunities to set staff on a path toward long-term career success.

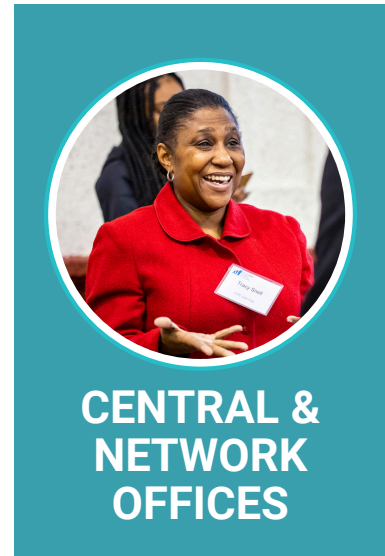
On the *Lead With CPS* website (lead.cps.edu), staff can search for leadership programs and opportunities, learn how the *Lead with CPS* framework aligns with their current role, and access additional tools, resources, and information.

The website and overall initiative framework is organized by three pillars: **Teachers** (also known as *Teachers Lead Chicago*), **School Leaders**, and **Central and Network Office** (also known as *Lead Citywide*). Within each pillar, staff can access resources and opportunities specific to role, desired skills and expertise, and career goals.

At its core, this program reflects a strategic investment in the professional growth of CPS employees, which, in turn, directly supports the success of the district's students. By prioritizing formal leadership development in education, *Lead with CPS aims to empower staff citywide to enhance their skills, elevate classroom learning, and build stronger school communities.*

Teachers Lead Chicago is one of the three core pillars of *Lead with CPS*, representing formal teacher career pathways to support distributed leadership for teachers citywide.

Core Pillars of *Lead with CPS*



This first-of-its-kind leadership initiative, *Teachers Lead Chicago* creates new opportunities for educators to expand on their skills and grow their impact both in their current teaching roles and schools, and in new leadership teaching roles.



While CPS offers many teacher leadership roles that operate at school discretion, what makes *Teachers Lead Chicago* unique is that it provides **formalized teacher pathways**. Focused on the district's highest-need schools, this program's early results are showing benefit to parties involved: improved teacher satisfaction and retention, enhanced school culture, strengthened student learning outcomes, improved staff autonomy, and much more.

The program is a cross-office initiative between CPS' Talent Office and the Office of Teaching and Learning, primarily focusing on the work of the Distributed and Supportive Leadership and the New Teacher Induction and Mentoring teams. These teams currently support the day-to-day leadership work of teachers and administrators in the *Teachers Lead Chicago* program.


CPS school leaders have the autonomy to develop and define school-specific staff leadership opportunities. *Teachers Lead Chicago*'s formalized and centralized roles are designed to be fundamentally different from existing informal leadership opportunities in two key ways:



CPS has intentionally designed these roles to **support a distributed leadership model**: responsibilities are shared among teacher leaders in order to foster collaboration and leverage diverse expertise.



Each role is supported by CPS Central Office through a codified responsibilities description, compensation, and professional development.

A photograph of two women sitting at a wooden table in an office or classroom setting. The woman on the left is wearing a dark blue sweater and is looking down at a document, holding a blue pen. The woman on the right is wearing a light-colored blazer over a dark top and is also looking down at the document, holding a black pen. There are several papers, a laptop, and a notebook on the table. In the background, there is a doorway and a bulletin board with various notices.

“Teachers Lead Chicago is a CPS strategy to formally define school-based leadership roles so teachers can lead without having to leave the classroom. Investing in empowered and supported educators is one of the cornerstones of CPS’ recommitment to strengthening the district’s instructional core.”

Maggie Gordon, Director of Distributed Leadership, Chicago Public Schools

Definition:**Instructional Distributed Leadership in CPS**

Distributed & Supportive Leadership establishes systems and structures that empower those closest to the instructional process with voice, agency, and leadership. This is achieved by fostering a collaborative culture where all teachers work together to continually enhance their expertise in culture, climate, and pedagogy. The focus is on building teacher capacity and promoting a shared responsibility for improving the instructional core, ultimately leading to improved student outcomes.

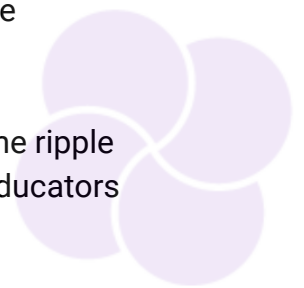
“What makes *Teachers Lead Chicago* unique is that it is both lateral and linear: a teacher can grow in their career from within their current classroom, financially supported by a stipend and Central Office support, or a teacher can leverage this model to help move up the more traditional career ladder from teaching to school administrator or a Central Office or citywide role.”

Ria Mehta, Executive Director of Leadership Development & Training in the CPS Talent Office

By fostering a supported, valued, and diverse workforce, *Teachers Lead Chicago* contributes to building one of the most skilled and inclusive teaching forces in the nation. These roles empower educators to enhance their skills, grow their careers, and create meaningful impacts on student learning and school communities – and are a component of CPS’ “Success 2029” Five Year Strategic Plan.

This case study highlights two of the primary *Teachers Lead Chicago* roles – **New Teacher Mentors** and **Team Directors** – through the voices of teachers who have experienced the program’s benefits first-hand, both in their careers and in the classroom.

The Goal: As more schools and partners embrace *Teachers Lead Chicago*, the ripple effects continue to inspire growth, leadership, and innovation among both educators and students, advancing a brighter future for Chicago’s classrooms.



“In these roles, we have a shared collective responsibility. It works so well to give us as teachers more room for growth, and actually take the time to reflect on our practice and the needs of our students. We collaborate to perform better as teaching professionals and as a school.”

Delilah Villasenor, 7th grade ELA Teacher at STEAM Magnet Academy



HISTORY AND SCOPE: BUILDING TEACHER CAREER PATHWAYS FOR GROWTH

Every CPS school aims to create conditions for success, and that includes prioritizing opportunities for staff to develop and excel. For decades, a wide variety of teacher leadership programs and roles have been employed across the district in an informal manner depending on the school and school leadership.

A 2017 staffing review showed both women and people of color were underrepresented in district and school leadership, a lack of leadership development opportunities throughout the CPS teaching career, and as a result, effective teachers were leaving CPS.

A distributed leadership model – where leadership roles and decision making are distributed and supported across the school to affect growth and change – was necessary, but not consistently practiced. Educators needed formal teacher career pathways without having to leave the classroom.

The strategy behind *Teachers Lead Chicago* is rooted in this context to help schools, school leaders, and the district solve for the evolving needs of teachers and students.

EVOLUTION OF THE PROGRAM

As a result of funding from a U.S. Department of Education Teacher and School Leader Incentive Grant, a pilot of *Teachers Lead Chicago* was launched in 2019 within seven CPS schools, and then grew to 33 schools in 2021.

The pilot took place within CPS Empowered Schools – a cohort of district schools where school leaders designed and supported new leadership roles for teachers called Multi-Classroom Leaders (MCLs). MCLs led small teacher teams to make improvements to curriculum and instructional outcomes.

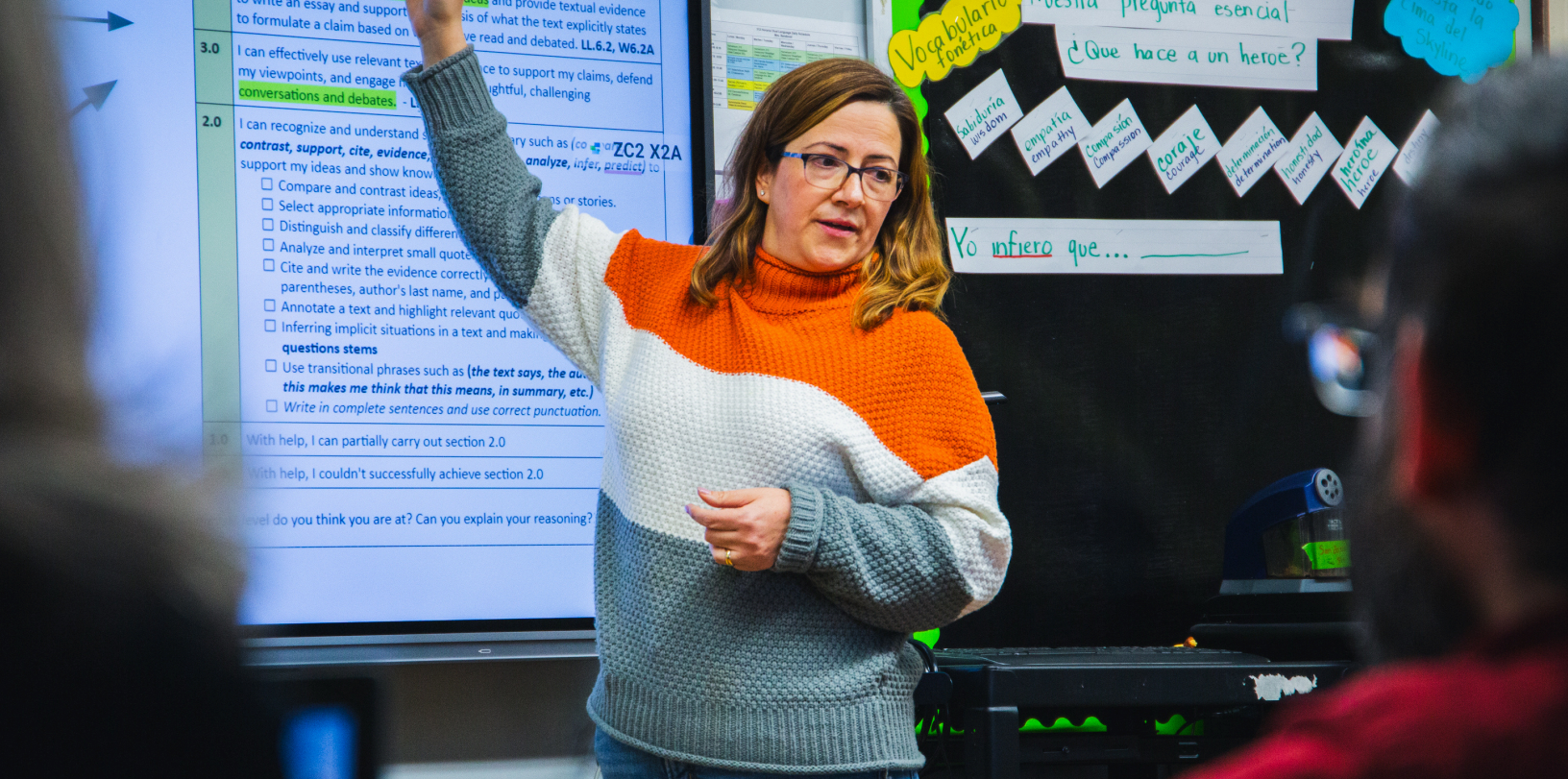
In this case, cross department collaboration was key between the Office of Teaching and Learning and the Talent Office. The Empowered Schools program was a subset of CPS' Opportunity Schools program, which provides targeted hiring and professional development support and resources for the hardest-to-staff schools and the highest-need subject areas, such as special education.

For the first time, distributed leadership supports became part of a central menu of supports available to schools.

In summer 2020, CPS' Office of Network Supports and Office of Teaching & Learning launched a tiered support model to improve instructional quality across schools. Using the CPS Opportunity Index and academic outcomes, schools were assigned tiers that determined eligibility for additional roles like Team Director or Lead Coach. While the tiered system will end in SY2025-26, lessons from its implementation will shape future efforts to strengthen instruction, collaboration, and staff retention.

After this pilot, and informed by continuous data review, CPS confirmed that randomized coaching was not having a larger impact on leadership development or instructional outcomes. In contrast, schools that sampled **connective coaching** to team learning structures reported a higher level of impact in both teacher and student outcomes. Based on this outcome and with data validation in hand, the Talent Office and the Office of Teaching and Learning teamed up to develop a strategy for this model of support to be available to more schools. By the end of the pilot, more than 600 teacher leaders were engaged with and participating in the program.

In 2022, *Teachers Lead Chicago* was fully launched in 67 schools to elevate teacher practice through carefully thought-out leadership roles. Today, the program continues to grow: with *Teachers Lead Chicago* currently supporting formal teacher leadership roles in more than 400 schools citywide.



BY THE NUMBERS

As of SY2024-25

1100+

TLC Teacher Leaders

400+

Schools Participating

190+

Resident Mentors

550+

New Teacher Mentors

240+

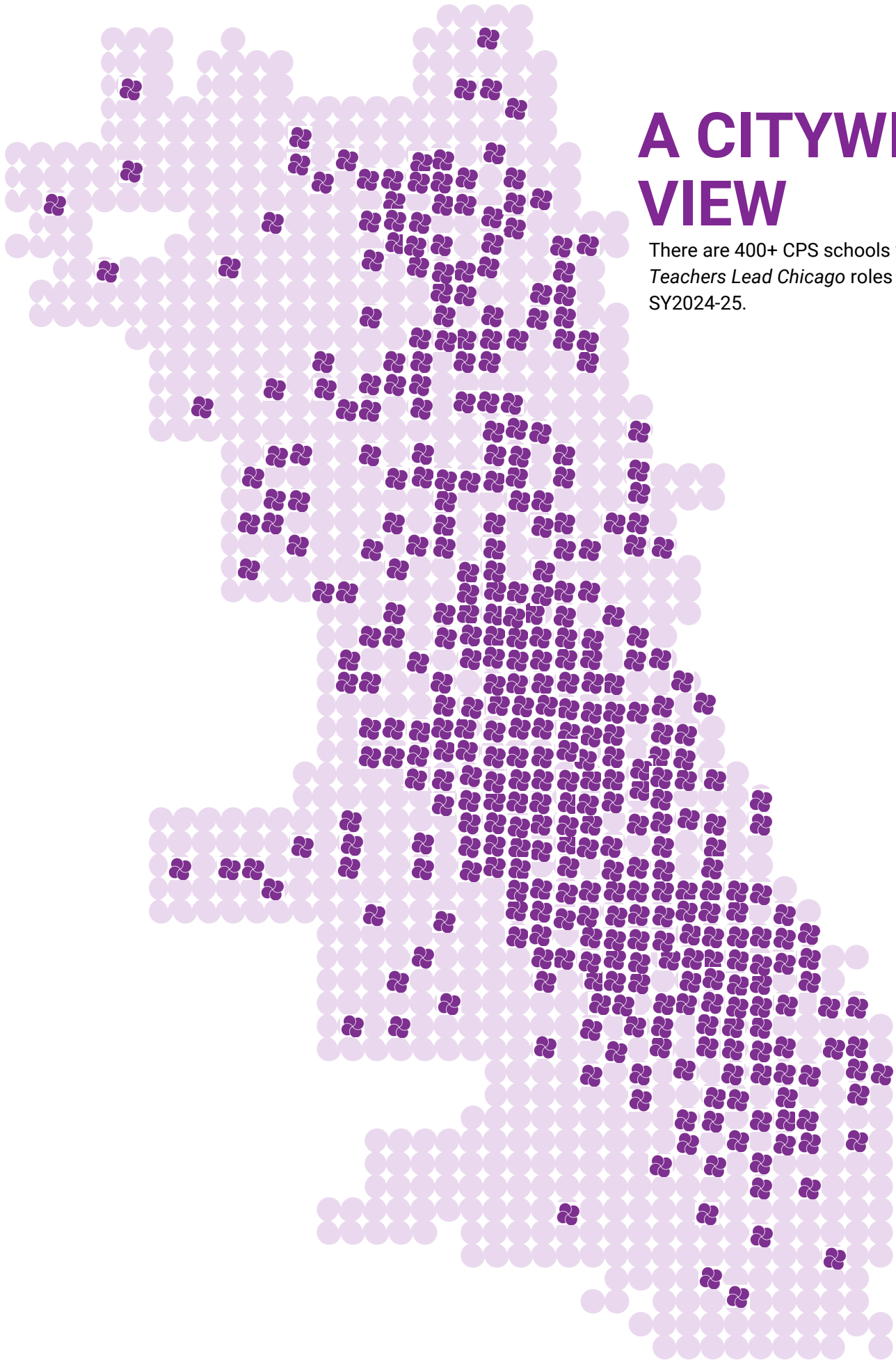
Team Directors

180+

Lead Coaches

81%

of district-governed high-needs schools now have *Teachers Lead Chicago* roles (357 total schools)



A CITYWIDE VIEW

There are 400+ CPS schools with *Teachers Lead Chicago* roles as of SY2024-25.



A LOOK AT TEACHER RETENTION: *TEACHERS LEAD CHICAGO* SCHOOLS COMPARED TO CPS

Since 2017, CPS has seen increases in retention of teacher leaders as compared to non-teacher leaders, and has increased retention among teacher leaders of color.

Teacher Leaders Chicago		District Overall	
TLC Teacher Leader Retention	88%	Teacher Retention	85.7%
Black/African American TLC Teacher Leader Retention*	86.1%	Black/African American Teacher Retention	81.8%
Hispanic/Latine TLC Teacher Leader Retention*	92.2%	Hispanic/Latine Teacher Retention	86.9%

Source: CPS FY24 Teacher Retention with Programs and Details

*Excludes Lead Coach roles as that role is intended to be a pathway into school leadership.

HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS

Teachers Lead Chicago supports and compensates formal teacher leadership opportunities in CPS schools. Participating schools – which are currently fall into Tiers 2 and 3 of CPS’ tiered instructional supports funding model – implement these leadership development roles within and beyond the classroom. These roles support formal distributed leadership where teachers are empowered to be both learners and leaders.

The intended results of this approach include greater team collaboration, increased staff retention, and ultimately, improved school-wide achievement.

“Teachers learn best from one another. *Teachers Lead Chicago* elevates the teacher leaders’ practice and encourages them to constantly reflect and make adjustments in their classroom practices.”

Principal Kelly Thigpen, Burnside Scholastic Academy on Chicago’s far south side.

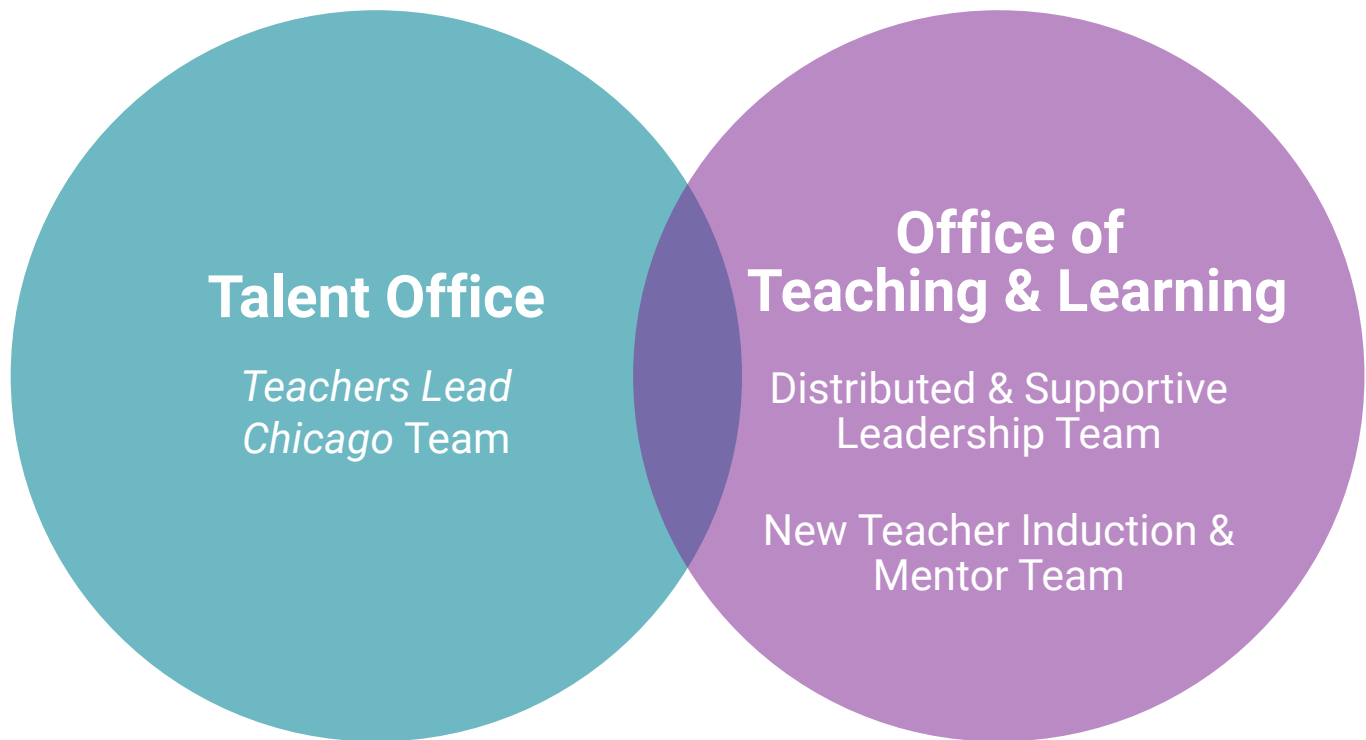
Intentional Design and Codification of the Roles: *Teachers Lead Chicago* was designed by a collective of CPS teams, primarily the Distributed and Supportive Leadership, the New Teacher Induction and Mentoring teams, and the Talent Office, who focus on formalized roles that support a distributed leadership model. Each role has responsibilities which are intentionally outlined to be both flexible for schools to implement, while also focused to advance content-agnostic responsibilities that facilitate improvement in instructional quality.

Qualifications and Vetting: Critical to the sustainability, quality, and impact of the program are the eligibility requirements and vetting process unique to *Teachers Lead Chicago*. For instance, for New Teacher Mentors and Team Directors, candidates are vetted and interviewed for their *Teachers Lead Chicago* role so their qualifications, as well as leadership aspirations, are well-matched to the role’s unique responsibilities. Eligibility requirements last for two years, and after two years, the teacher leader must demonstrate evidence of continued commitment and effectiveness in/of their role. It’s this process and collection of measures that ensure the fidelity of the program.

Compensation and Autonomy: Teachers are compensated for their time and investment in the role, including stipend, salary, and/or release time. Compensation depends on the role and work of the teacher leader. As of SY2024-25, compensation ranged from a \$1,700 annual stipend to a full-time salaried position.

A Multi-Pronged Support System: In order to successfully implement their leadership roles, teachers receive support from the CPS Talent and Teaching and Learning Offices. These teams have expertise in professional development as well as classroom instruction support. Importantly, teacher leaders and school leaders in *Teachers Lead Chicago* schools are supported by Central Office specialists who meet with them in their schools, alongside receiving district-wide professional learnings to supplement and enhance teacher skill sets. CPS Central Office offers professional development opportunities and ongoing learnings to ensure an effective and fulfilling experience.

CPS Central Office support behind *Teachers Lead Chicago*:



Talent Office:

Teachers Lead Chicago Team: Operates formal teacher career pathways, including: Qualification and selection processes; creating and providing guidance on qualification, funding, and selection; evaluation, surveying and data management; marketing and recruitment; and pipeline development.

Office of Teaching & Learning:

Distributed & Supportive Leadership Team: Engages teacher and school leaders with job-embedded, differentiated, professional learning, coaching, and consulting. Supports are grounded in leadership learning and development that provides the identity, capabilities, concepts, and skills for increased leadership performance.

New Teacher Induction & Mentor Team: Supports and ensures teacher retention and professional growth for pre-service, new and early career teachers. Develops induction teacher leaders as mentors and subject matter experts of best practices – growing in their proficiency of the Teacher Leader Framework.

Active Roles on Instructional Leadership Teams (ILTs): Instructional Leadership Teams or ILTs are required in all CPS schools and are comprised of a team of teachers who meet regularly to:

- Develop teacher leaders' capacity to lead adult learners, and to deepen their understanding of the content and structure of inquiry-based learning cycles they lead,
- Plan, reflect on, and make decisions based on teacher team learning cycle progress and outcomes,
- Monitor student and teacher experiences, and
- Advance the instructional core priority outlined within the Continuous Improvement Work Plan (CIWP).

The ILT is guided by the Office of Teaching and Learning and the Office of Network Support, as well as the principal, and acts as the nucleus of the schools' instructional community.

Teachers Lead Chicago teacher leaders are responsible for actively contributing to and participating on the ILT and bringing that work back to the teams of teachers they lead as well. In this way, insights and expertise from the teacher leader are informing the work of the ILT, and takeaways are flowing back to teams of teachers to ensure continuous improvement and collaboration. And, while New Teacher Mentors and Resident Mentors don't serve on ILTs directly, their roles advance the work of the ILT overall.

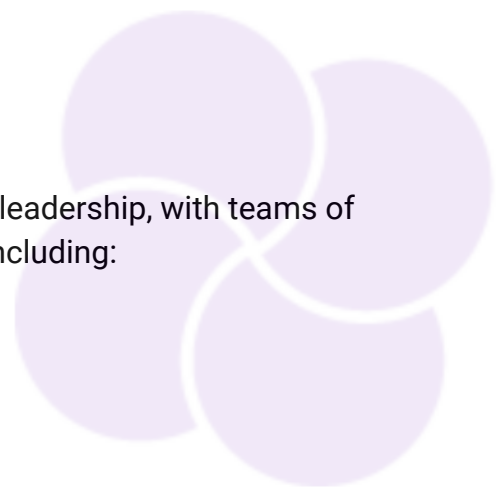
Roles within Teachers Lead Chicago

The design of *Teachers Lead Chicago* supports distributed leadership, with teams of formal teacher leadership in varying but formalized roles, including:

- New Teacher Mentors
- Resident Mentors
- Team Directors
- Lead Coaches

In each role, highly effective teachers have the opportunity to expand their impact without leaving the classroom or their school.

This snapshot details two of these roles – **New Teacher Mentors** and **Team Directors**. New Teacher Mentors guide a new CPS teacher through their first two years in the system, and Team Directors lead grade level or subject matter teams through curriculum alignment and institutional goals.



New Teacher Mentor

The anticipation of a first school year for a new teacher can be overwhelming: new teachers often cycle through excitement, survival, disillusionment, and reflection throughout their first year. New Teacher Mentors act as lifelines for new teachers to feel supported, valued, and to help grow their teacher practice and autonomy as educators. As their career develops, new teachers continue to rely on their mentors as they navigate challenges inside and outside the classroom.

As of this snapshot publication, more than 550 New Teacher Mentors are supporting new teachers in more than 200 high-need CPS schools.

School-based New Teacher Mentors have been in the CPS system since SY2017-18 and act as a guide and sounding board for CPS' newest teachers through:

- Continuous co-reflection on new teacher practice, aligned to the CPS New Teacher Development Areas, as well as professional goal setting for the new teacher.
- Facilitation of observation cycles with the new teacher, including a pre- and post-observation conversation and opportunities to observe both the new teacher's and mentor's practice.
- Intentional planning of regular check-ins – totaling three hours per month – to provide instructional, institutional, and emotional support to the new teacher.
- Instructional support that includes lesson mapping, problem solving, and resourcing to assist the new teacher in meeting curriculum goals and overcoming classroom challenges.

To ensure robust support for new teachers, funding for substitutes is provided to schools to release the mentor to observe new teacher practice.

The New Teacher Mentor role has been critical in providing support to early career teachers, giving them a stronger sense of belonging in the CPS system and resulting in higher new teacher retention.

In fact, schools with New Teacher Mentors reached 76.9 percent school-based retention, which is higher than the District's new teacher retention overall at 74.8 percent.

Plus, new teachers who opted into a second year of new teacher mentorship were retained at their school at 16.7 percent higher than those who did not.

Source: Chicago Public Schools data from November 2023 to November 2024.



Meet a New Teacher Mentor: Rosario Canizales

Rosario Canizales has been instrumental in guiding new middle school science educators as a New Teacher Mentor at Maria Saucedo STEAM Magnet Academy in Little Village.

In this role, she has helped first year teacher Brittany to implement an “Amplify Science” program by developing a clear scope and sequence for the program, refine classroom management strategies, and provide her constructive feedback.

This mentorship not only enhanced the new teacher’s confidence and skills, but also created a positive learning environment for students. Rosario sees mentorship as essential for helping new teachers transition smoothly, fostering their professional growth, and improving teacher retention.

She believes this support system ensures that new educators successfully navigate the complexities of teaching, benefiting students and the broader school community.

And her mentee isn’t the only one who benefits from Rosario’s leadership role as a New Teacher Mentor.

“Being a teacher leader has enhanced my own sense of purpose and commitment to education,” Rosario reflects.

“Each year brings its own challenges, but it also offers countless opportunities to learn and grow alongside my students and colleagues, keeping my passion for education alive.”

“To me, mentorship is about ensuring our new teachers not only survive, but truly thrive in their roles.”

Rosario Canizales, New Teacher Leader, Maria Saucedo STEAM Magnet Academy

Meet a New Teacher Mentor:

Julia Woods

Julia Woods is an enthusiastic fourth and fifth special education teacher at John H. Hamline Elementary in Back of the Yards, and a proud CPS graduate who has spent a decade supporting Chicago youth.

As a New Teacher Mentor, Julia supports two first-year teachers: a middle school science teacher and a special education teacher. Her mentorship involves weekly check-ins and daily interactions, offering her mentees guidance, structure, and encouragement to navigate the challenges of their first year.

“I am the voice of reason and positivity because the first year of teaching can be challenging,” Julia explains. She draws on her personal experience of feeling overwhelmed during her first year, ensuring her mentees never feel alone. Whether it’s helping the special education teacher implement effective accommodations or connecting the science teacher with classroom and school resources, Julia emphasizes collaboration, modeling a growth mindset, and practical solutions to empower her mentees.

“It’s important to have someone that cares about this new teacher,” Julia reflects, underscoring the sense of community her role fosters.

Julia values the formal support she receives from the district, including regular meetings that support professional development and build their capacity as teacher leaders. For her, being a teacher leader has deepened her sense of belonging and allowed her to make a lasting impact without leaving the classroom. She sees her role as vital to teacher retention and school culture, acting as a bridge between administration and new teachers.



“Having this program uplifts everyone – it makes us better as a team, as a school, and as a community.”

Julia Woods, New Teacher Mentor, John H. Hamline Elementary

Team Director

The Team Director serves as an in-classroom teacher who also leads a team of teachers across grade level or instruction area, focusing on the instructional core and school-level continuous improvement. This role is centered on instructional coaching, including:

1. Coaching and mentoring peers through action-based instructional development
2. Facilitating collaborative inquiry and inquiry cycles for grade and content areas
3. Advancing school-wide priorities for cohesive distributive systems and structures.

Team Directors serve on Instructional Leadership Teams (ILT) to implement improvement across their school and grade-level teams while also advancing a school and team culture of learning and collaboration through connective 1:1 coaching. This role is given released time to provide classroom observation, feedback, and reflection for building team teachers' capacity. These roles also receive a stipend of \$1,500 per semester to compensate for the additional work of these roles.

As of this spring 2025, more than 200 Team Directors are serving in approximately 115 high-need schools.





Meet a Team Director: Henry Cardenas

Henry Cardenas, an experienced educator with over a decade in the field, currently serves as a dual-language teacher and *Teachers Lead Chicago* Team Director at Carl Von Linne Elementary. As a Team Director, he collaborates with the Instructional Leadership Team, co-leads the fifth-sixth grade team, and provides connective coaching to his colleagues. His Team Director role ensures instructional strategies are aligned across grade levels, fostering consistency and student growth.

“*Teachers Lead Chicago* allows educators to expand their leadership attributes and play an active role in implementing meaningful change.”

Henry Cardenas, New Teacher Mentor, Carl Von Linne Elementary

Henry reflects that one of the most significant impacts of the program has been the development of a unified approach to classroom instruction through Learning Cycles. These cycles, supported by monthly coaching from district leaders, allow teachers to implement data-driven strategies that directly benefit students. During a recent session, grade-level teams shared their progress, and despite differences in subject areas and grade levels, a common thread emerged – educators across PK-8 were identifying similar objectives and refining their data collection strategies in parallel. This alignment has strengthened instructional practices across the school, ensuring every student receives a high-quality education tailored to their needs.

For Henry, being a teacher leader has deepened his sense of purpose and agency in his work. “It has given me the opportunity to strengthen my leadership skills and take ownership of my practice,” he reflects. “Schools should invest in teacher leadership to build the capacity of their educators,” he advises, emphasizing that when teachers are given the opportunity to lead, both students and the school community thrive.

Meet Team Director: **Delilah Villasenor**

Delilah's journey highlights the importance of formal teacher leadership roles in creating a positive and results-driven school environment.

She is a passionate educator and leader at Maria Saucedo STEAM Magnet Academy in Chicago's Little Village neighborhood, where she has taught seventh grade English Language Arts (ELA) for four years. Beyond the classroom, she has embraced leadership as the Team Director for fifth through eighth grade ELA teachers.

In her role, Delilah leads team meetings, facilitates curriculum planning, works with the team to analyze data to identify student needs, and ensures alignment between grade levels.

"I love that I'm able to build trusting relationships with people," she shared, emphasizing the value of collaboration across grades to create a cohesive curriculum that supports students' growth. For Delilah, the role is about fostering teamwork, problem-solving, and ensuring all students receive the support they need to succeed academically.

The impact of her leadership role is evident in the school's improved student outcomes and teacher collaboration. One example of success was addressing students' challenges with vocabulary: a key area for growth, particularly in their large Latine student population. Delilah and the fifth-eighth grade team identified resources to enhance vocabulary instruction, helping students strengthen their writing and academic discussions. Sharing these tools across grades resulted in measurable improvements in test scores.

For Delilah, being a teacher leader has been a transformative experience, helping her build confidence, foster meaningful relationships, and deepen her sense of belonging within the school community. "It's been amazing to step into this role and empower myself and other teachers," she said. She sees teacher leadership as a bridge between administration and teachers, fostering collaboration, professional growth, and shared responsibility.



“We can see the proven results in our student scores and in the way teachers work together. It’s a lasting impact.”

LEARNINGS

Self-reported teacher findings from participating schools demonstrate impact in teacher and school success: teacher satisfaction is higher, teacher retention is on the rise, and teachers feel they have greater capacity to effectively do their jobs.

A 2025 survey of *Teachers Lead Chicago* school leaders and teachers found:

100%

of school leaders report school climate, collaboration, and empowerment is improving due to teacher leader support.

95%

of school leaders report retention is improving due to teacher leader support.

99%

of school leaders report teacher effectiveness is improving due to teacher leader support.

99%

of school leaders report student growth and achievement is improving due to teacher leader support.

92%

of teachers report teacher leaders at their schools support their morale.

94%

of teachers report they feel valued at schools with teacher leaders.

Current CPS Teacher Leaders Rosario, Julia, Henry, and Delilah exemplify the transformative impact that schools are experiencing through the *Teachers Lead Chicago* program. Anecdotally, teachers at schools with these formalized leadership roles consistently share how the program has positively influenced their personal development and enhanced classroom learning. This intentional design of formal teacher leadership roles not only supports individual teacher growth but also contributes significantly to increased teacher satisfaction, retention, and capacity across participating schools.

Teacher Satisfaction Has Improved

Teacher satisfaction has significantly increased as a result of *Teachers Lead Chicago*. A survey conducted by CPS in partnership with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) in May 2024 gathered responses from 1,369 teachers across 163 Teachers Lead Chicago schools. The results emphasize how formalized teacher leadership roles enhance morale, professional growth, and retention among educators.

Teachers shared:

95%

reported teacher leaders positively impacted morale, making them feel appreciated and valued.

93%

said the support from teacher leaders helped them grow or improve as educators.

74%

credited teacher leaders with influencing their decision to remain at their school.

New teachers, in particular, benefited from having a New Teacher Mentor. By the end of the 2023-2024 school year, **mentored new teachers reported satisfaction rates eight percentage points higher than their non-mentored peers**. When asked if someone had provided feedback and support to improve their teaching, mentored new teachers reported satisfaction rates more than 11 percentage points higher than their non-mentored counterparts.

Highly Effective Teachers Are Being Retained

Teacher leaders, such as New Teacher Mentors or Team Directors, have experienced higher retention rates on average. Team Director roles are currently offered at schools based on tiered needs. From November 2023 to November 2024, overall school-level retention in Tier 2 and 3 schools was 83.2 percent, while retention rates for Team Directors and New Teacher Mentors in those schools had retention rates of 88.2 percent and 88.9 percent, respectively – **indicating that teachers in these positions in high-need schools is a retention strategy.**

“Having a {teacher leader} is only going to be a positive. It helps with retention with new teachers. In education, we face challenges every day. If we want to remove one – it’s having peer mentors to help these teachers stay at our school.”

Julia Woods, New Teacher Mentor, John H. Hamline Elementary

Lead Coaches Translating into a New School Leader Pipeline

In a one-year snapshot, from November 2023 to November 2024, 73.6 percent of Lead Coaches returned for the following school year as a Lead Coach. Further, 16 Lead Coaches in that time period were promoted to school leadership roles as principals or assistant principals. Since SY2022-23, a total of 35 Lead Coaches have moved into school leadership roles within CPS.

Teacher Leaders of Color Comparison

The *Teachers Lead Chicago* program appears to be making a notable impact in addressing the underrepresentation of people of color in leadership roles within Chicago Public Schools. While only 20.6 percent of current CPS teachers are African American and 25 percent are Hispanic, the program has successfully elevated the representation of these groups in leadership pathways. Specifically, African American teachers comprise 32 percent of *Teachers Lead Chicago* teacher leaders, while Hispanic/Latine teachers represent 22.3 percent, with a total of 60.9 percent BIPOC representation in the program. This data suggests that the *Teachers Lead Chicago* program is fostering opportunities for underrepresented groups in leadership demographics. *Source: CPS.edu and the CPS SY2024-25 TLC Dashboard.*

Teacher Practice and Capacity is Improving

Teacher Leaders are transforming classrooms, fostering collaboration, and driving student achievement through meaningful support and guidance. Their impact is reflected not just in the teacher-reported survey data, but also in the enhancement of their instructional practice and their capacity to serve students' educational needs.

“My instructional practice has grown significantly through my collaboration with my [New Teacher Mentor] leader. They introduced me to differentiated instruction, which has transformed how I approach lesson planning, ensuring that all students, regardless of their abilities, have access to the material in a way that suits their learning style.”

Jorge Carrascal, Teacher, Marie Sklodowska Curie Metropolitan High School

Jorge's experience mirrors survey results, where 93 percent of teachers reported that the formalized support from teacher leaders helped them grow or improve as educators. Additionally, 94 percent of teachers highlighted how teacher leaders enhanced the quality and benefits of collaboration across school staff, creating a more cohesive and supportive teaching environment. *Source: Teachers Lead Chicago Survey, conducted in partnership with AIR, May 2024.*

“After working with the Team Director at my school on lesson planning and curriculum, I have improved my ability to provide more individualized accommodations and modifications for students at grade level. I now create specific materials for students that are more aligned with grade-level standards while helping them achieve their goals.”

Kara Lee, Teacher, Harriett Sayre Public School


These improvements in teacher capacity resonate in classrooms, where 90 percent of teachers said that support from teacher leaders helped improve their students' growth and achievement. *Source: Teachers Lead Chicago Survey, conducted in partnership with AIR, May 2024.* **Teacher Leaders are not only strengthening instructional practices but also creating lasting impacts on student success.**


CONCLUSION


Lessons Learned and the Future of *Teachers Lead Chicago*


As *Teachers Lead Chicago* continues to grow and evolve, the next phase is centered on refining and expanding the teacher leadership program to increase impact and sustainability. With a variety of teacher leadership roles across CPS, *Teachers Lead Chicago* seeks to create more coherence and clarity to ensure strategic, scalable implementation, and satisfaction.


This will be achieved by focusing on the following key areas, all of which are deeply and directly rooted in feedback and survey insights from teachers, teacher leaders, and school leaders:


 **Differentiated Role Definitions:** Clearer and differentiated role definitions for all teacher leader positions, with a continued emphasis on content-agnostic peer coaching and mentorship to support instructional growth.

 **Centralized School Eligibility and Teacher Qualification Processes:** A streamlined, centralized process for all *Teachers Lead Chicago* roles to ensure consistency and fidelity in implementation across schools. Provide schools that indicate capacity and need an application process to implement Team Director roles.

 **Sustainable Funding Models:** Development of sustainable funding models that provide equitable resources to high-need schools, allowing flexibility for schools to self-fund teacher leader positions.

 **Improved Communication and Scheduling Resources:** Enhanced guidance and resources for school and teacher leaders, including clear protocols for role selection and best practices.

 **Aspiring Teachers Lead Chicago Pathway:** Creation of a pathway for teachers in schools without a strong bench of teacher leaders, providing preparation, foundational skills, and growth opportunities to strengthen the pipeline of future leaders.

 **Collaborative Networks and Professional Learning:** Expanded professional learning opportunities for both teacher leaders and school leaders, fostering collaborative networks to address school priorities and improve student outcomes.

Teachers Lead Chicago will continue to evolve in response to teacher input, ensuring the program remains flexible and aligned with teachers' career goals and needs. By listening to the voices of those in schools, the Talent Office and the Office of Teaching and Learning will adapt the program to meet the challenges and opportunities that arise, ensuring a pathway for teacher leadership that is impactful and responsive to the ever-changing needs of our educators and students.

To learn more about *Teachers Lead Chicago*, visit cps.edu/sites/lead-with-cps/teachers or scan this QR code:



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