



New Organizations, New Voices

The Landscape of Today's Teachers Shaping Policy

Kaitlin Pennington June 2013

Center for American Progress



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Introduction and summary

In the past five years, a number of grassroots groups and fellowships have emerged across the United States with the goal of giving teachers a greater role and a stronger voice in improving everything from the professional practice of teaching to the way the profession is governed. These groups are often called “teacher-voice organizations,” and in many cases they are established with the aim of giving practicing teachers direct access to influence the policies that affect their practice.

Education scholars note the powerful benefits of having *teacher voice* at the table when education policy is being discussed—both for teachers and for the educational system as a whole. According to Julia Koppich, an education policy analyst and labor and management expert:

While teachers do not have a monopoly on educational wisdom, their first-hand perspective gives them a unique and critical vantage point from which to assess the efficacy of educational policy decisions. Omitting them from this arena seems an approach destined to create more problems than it solves.¹

As education policies have evolved and recent policy initiatives have worked to expose the organizational and structural barriers to improving teaching, teacher voice in policy is perhaps more relevant and important than ever before. “There are people far removed from the classroom making decisions that impact what happens in classrooms,” says William Wong, a member of Educators 4 Excellence Los Angeles and the president of the San Gabriel Teachers Association. “It’s important that teacher input be considered, as they’re the practitioners that implement policies each day with students.”

These new teacher-voice organizations, however, are not the only teacher groups—or the largest groups—to push on issues around the teaching profession. Until recently, teachers unions were the loudest and sometimes the only voices representing teachers and their interests. It’s important to note that not all teachers agree with these new emerging groups or with the positions of the nation’s two

largest teachers unions. Yet the birth of these new groups reveals a fact that was previously hidden: Teacher voice is not monolithic. The very existence of teacher-voice groups and their growth has been noted and has prompted union leaders and others to look more closely at their diverse missions and messages. As Bill Raabe, director of the National Education Association's Center for Great Public Schools, points out:

I think these organizations will help raise teacher voice, and we're going to clearly partner with a number of them to bring their voice into the union and also to think about how to use those voices more strategically in the policy debates. ... And I'm talking about voices of practicing teachers that maybe wouldn't have been involved in the union [without teacher voice organizations].²

Many teacher-voice groups are working under the assumption that involvement in policy discussions also affords teachers leadership opportunities not yet seen in our current education system. School districts experimenting with career ladders for teachers have begun to consider working with the teacher-voice organizations to increase opportunities for teacher professional development. Officials of the District of Columbia Public Schools, or DCPS, have added teacher-voice-organization opportunities such as the Hope Street Group National Teacher Fellowship, the Teach Plus Teaching Policy Fellowship, and the U.S. Department of Education's Teaching Ambassador Fellowship to their list of leadership-training experiences in DCPS's career-ladder program for teachers known as the Leadership Initiative For Teachers, or LIFT.³ For some leaders of the new teacher-voice groups, the inclusion of their leadership opportunities as part of what districts consider to be official training begins to fulfill one of the goals of teacher-voice groups: elevating the teaching profession by providing teachers with leadership opportunities outside of the classroom while continuing to teach.

This report highlights several common characteristics and many unique differences among the teacher-voice organizations and fellowships. The commonalities and differences in the teacher-voice organizations and fellowships suggest that the current education-reform environment has spurred the birth of these groups that are all working toward getting more teachers directly involved in the policies that impact their daily teaching experiences. But the way in which the organizations go about getting the teachers involved is unique to each group's individual founding principles, missions, and structures. Yet, as mentioned above, there are basic elements shared by teacher-voice groups and fellowships, which include the following:

- Each organization or fellowship was formed using a unique grassroots model.
- Teacher-voice organizations and fellowships operate under the premise that teacher voice is not monolithic.
- Despite differences in structure, all of these teacher-voice organizations and fellowships are working on ways to professionalize the teaching profession.
- Technology is integral to all organizations and fellowships either as a driver of programs offered or as a link to connect participants.
- All teacher-voice organizations and fellowships respect the history of teachers unions and see them as powerful players with which to partner.
- Teacher-voice organization and fellowship membership is diverse.
- Funding often comes from outside sources.
- Organizations and fellowships overlap in some policy interests, but the mix is unique to each group.

While it may not be possible at this moment to determine the impact of teacher-voice groups given their short histories and size, this paper details the role that teacher voice is playing in education reform, at a time when the teacher-voice movement has picked up speed and is growing in importance.

Methodology

The following analysis of teacher-voice organizations and fellowships in the context of what some are calling a teacher-voice movement uses qualitative data collected through interviews with education-policy scholars and academics, leaders of teacher-voice organizations and fellowships, teachers-union officials, and teachers. (The full list of respondents is included in the appendix.) Research consisted of a review of scholarly and think-tank research

and relevant news and journal articles on the role of teacher voice in education policy. The particular teacher-voice organizations and fellowships were selected because they are influential in the size and scope of their work, though the list is by no means comprehensive and it is possible that relevant organizations and fellowships are not mentioned. The organizations and fellowships are presented by the size of their membership.

The latest chapter in a longer story

The new teacher-voice organizations and fellowships have sprung up at this particular time and in this particular environment in relation to changes in the teaching profession, but this is not the first time that teachers have sought to have a voice at the policy table. The nation's two largest teacher organizations—the American Federation of Teachers, or AFT, and the National Education Association, or NEA—are unions that are most known for representing teacher voice in their efforts to support better wages and working conditions for teachers through collective bargaining. But at different times in their past, both unions took on other issues that were sometimes only tangentially related to the work of teaching. In the first half of the 20th century, for example, the AFT pushed for its mostly female members to be able to marry and have children without losing their jobs—something that wasn't legal in many states until the 1930s. In addition, members of some AFT locals were among the first white educators in the nation to adopt materials for Black History Month.⁴ In the 1960s the NEA pushed for the desegregation of teachers' associations in the South.⁵

But the primary work of both unions was to improve working conditions, pay, and benefits for teachers. In the 1960s teachers unions expressed teacher voice through collective-bargaining agreements that resembled those in the private-sector labor movement.⁶ *Management*, in this case the districts and administrators, and *labor*, or teachers and other school staff, pitted themselves against each other to bargain everything from the amount of time spent in school buildings to employees' salaries. The environment was adversarial for many reasons, in large part because teachers, most of whom were women, were poorly paid and subject to abysmal working conditions.⁷ The residue from the union movement a half-century ago continues to fuel attitudes and feelings about teachers today—both inside and outside the profession. In addition, the prescriptive collectively bargained contracts of that time continue today to influence policies that affect teachers and administrators, and shape the ability for districts, states, and federal policymakers to reform the education system in the United States.

In the mid-1980s, AFT President Al Shanker called for a “second revolution” in which teachers would bargain for improved education. Shanker took the unusual position of agreeing with the 1983 report, “A Nation at Risk,” written by a commission during the Reagan administration. The report warned of a rising tide of mediocrity in American education. After the report’s release, Shanker began advocating for peer review, merit pay, and school choice, and became a strong proponent of standards testing and the accountability movement, policies that had more to do with the quality of education in schools than teacher-workplace issues.⁸ Later, in 1996, Shanker told union delegates, “It’s as much your duty to preserve public education as it is to negotiate a good contract.”⁹ The next year in 1997, NEA President Bob Chase called for his union to be a “champion of quality teaching and quality education”—what he coined as “new unionism.”¹⁰

During this same time period, the Teacher Union Reform Network, or TURN, a group of reform-minded AFT and NEA locals, was founded to challenge teachers-union leaders to take steps to promote teachers as professionals, advance a broad-based new unionism, and link professionalism and new unionism to ways for improving student learning.¹¹ Today 200 AFT and NEA locals are a part of TURN in six different regions throughout the United States.¹² Under the leadership of TURN, these locals support reform efforts such as teacher accountability, peer assistance and review, and alternative compensation systems. Some of the local unions have partnered with districts to enact reform efforts such as the Denver Classroom Teachers Association partnership with Denver Public Schools to create a compensation system based on increased teacher knowledge and skills and student achievement.¹³ According to Adam Urbanski, co-founder of TURN, “There is a growing realization that the best way to serve your members is to make sure they are successful with their work.” He says TURN’s agenda “is not only ethically the right agenda, but it’s also in the enlightened self-interest of unions. The more progressive and involved, the stronger they become.”¹⁴

In the first decade of the 21st century, both the AFT and NEA have continued education-reform efforts. In 2011 NEA released the report, “Transforming Teaching: Connecting Professional Responsibility with Student Learning,” which largely departed from previous union positions on everything from performance pay to the use of student achievement as a factor in teacher evaluations.¹⁵ While some may have found the report’s recommendations surprising, reform-minded union leaders were not shocked. “My long experience with education reform over three decades suggests that sometimes it’s not a question of the union bringing teachers along; it’s the union catching up with where the teachers already are,” Urbanski says. “Union

leaders fear that their members would rebel and resist certain policies and then they realize that their members already believed this for a long time.”¹⁶

The AFT, under the leadership of its president, Randi Weingarten, has been focused on what has been termed “solution-driven unionism,” which Weingarten notes is unionism that’s “rooted in solving problems, not winning arguments.” According to Weingarten, “While we will continue to fight for the resources children need, we must also devise innovative, creative and new approaches to help all children succeed.”¹⁷ In December 2012 the AFT released a report detailing a *bar exam* for teachers—a rigorous professional assessment prior to licensure that would serve the same function as the bar exam for lawyers and board certification for doctors.¹⁸ All recent reform efforts will directly impact the teaching profession and the way that teachers function in the classroom. For that reason, and perhaps now more than ever, teacher voice is necessary in education policy.

“Teachers always have wanted a voice in the profession, and to be a profession,” explains Jo Anderson, senior advisor to Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and former executive director of the Illinois Education Association, the NEA affiliate in Illinois. According to Anderson:

*When it comes to teacher evaluation, teacher preparation, and professional development, teachers have been complaining about the poor quality of these systems for years. But the unions did not make improvements in these systems their priority in local negotiations or state-lobbying efforts. Now the unions are definitely making improvements in these processes top priorities.*¹⁹

Emergence of teacher-voice organizations and fellowships

There are several reasons why so many new teacher-voice organizations have sprung up in the past few years, and perhaps the most powerful is the effect of federal policy requiring collaboration among teachers, administrators, school boards, and state-education officials around the improvement of education. New federal grant-giving programs such as Race to the Top, School Improvement Grants, and the Teacher Incentive Fund—all requiring teachers-union sign-off in order for states and districts to receive additional funds—have necessitated conversations about reform efforts between local teachers unions and state and district school management. The No Child Left Behind waivers have also inspired innovation through collaboration in order to set aside the law’s outdated policies. In some places such as New Haven, Connecticut, and Newark, New Jersey, unions and districts have come together to create new teacher-evaluation systems that both labor and management agree upon.²⁰

While districts and unions continue to figure out how to work with each other in this time of change, new organizations have emerged to give teachers another avenue to voice their opinions on the efforts shaping their profession. Alesha Daughtrey, with the teacher-voice organization Center for Teaching Quality, is excited by the possibilities inherent in organizations such as hers. “I think that there are a lot of opportunities for innovation that didn’t exist a number of years ago,” she says. “We’re seeing this as the right moment for teachers to step in as a movement and begin to think, ‘What is it that we might want to do as expert practitioners with some really brilliant ideas to transform our schools?’”²¹

A 2011 poll commissioned by the Education Sector, a small Washington, D.C., education-focused think tank, showed continued support among teachers for unions, with 81 percent of teachers polled agreeing that without a union, teachers would be vulnerable to school politics or to administrators who abuse their power.²² The same poll, however, showed that a growing number of teachers believe the union’s role in education reform should change. Consider this: From 2007 to 2011 the percentage of teachers who believe that unions should put more

focus than they currently do on issues such as improving teacher quality and student achievement rose by 11 percent. According to Bill Raabe, “What we’re starting to realize is that the definition of bread-and-butter issues, or what falls under that definition, has to be much broader. ... The things that are really bread-and-butter issues to teachers are beyond their pay and benefits.” Raabe says his organization sees that teachers want to have a say in policy issues such as evaluation and assessment, and that these are key components of his group’s portfolio of interests. He sees the partnering of various teacher-voice organizations and fellowships as one way of focusing on these issues and getting more teachers involved.²³

Not all union leaders share Raabe’s position on the new teacher-voice organizations and fellowships. According to Rob Weil, director of field programs and educational issues at the AFT, the teacher-voice groups may be like boutiques—small, with specialized or targeted followings, but not powerful enough to have an impact. “Being heard does require ideas, but change also requires power and growing numbers,” Weil says. “I can tweet something, but until a lot of people are saying the same thing, they are not going to listen to us; that’s why membership is important to any advocacy group. It’s the difference between a thought and a movement.” What is missing from the teacher-voice groups, Weil said, is the sheer force of numbers and a coalition around a clear mission. “We don’t see this as one person can do this work, we believe it’s people creating the movement together,” he says. “The Arab Spring didn’t happen just because one person tweeted. Sure, it started with a tweet but when others joined, it became a movement and that’s when it changed policy.”²⁴ Weil also notes that teacher-voice groups do not have elected leadership, which he views as problematic. On the other hand, teachers unions such as the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers are run by leaders who are elected by teachers to represent their views. This structure, Weil believes, ensures democratic representation of teacher voice.

Regardless of what the union leaders think, many of the new teacher-voice groups see their work as residing in the broader issues that Raabe identifies as becoming bread-and-butter issues to teachers: Common Core State Standards implementation, teacher-evaluation rubric creation and revisions, and leadership opportunities for teachers who wish to stay in the classroom. Some groups focus specifically on education policies beyond wages and benefits. Some groups are fellowships that are offered through the U.S. government. Some groups are fellowships offered through established nonprofit organizations. And some groups are nonprofit organizations that have been created to focus solely

on getting the voices of more teachers heard. The emergence of these groups at this pivotal moment in education-policy history is no doubt related to the rumblings of change happening at the state and federal level, in districts across the country, and the desire of teachers for more involvement in the design and implementation of policies that impact their daily work.

Common characteristics of teacher-voice organizations and fellowships

Despite the variety and geographic dispersion of teacher-voice organizations and fellowships, they share a number of commonalities. These common characteristics illuminate how and why the groups emerged, the situations that encouraged their creation, and what they share in terms of visions and goals. Together they suggest that the groups are organic and grew to fill the needs of teachers that were not being met by union membership. While the groups and fellowships have many commonalities, they also have distinct differences that make the various ways they approach the task of getting teachers' voices heard in policy discussions and decision making unique.

Each organization or fellowship was formed using a unique grassroots model

Each of the teacher-voice organizations and fellowships was born when a single person or a small group of people working in education became concerned that teachers needed to be more directly involved in the design and implementation of education policy at the district, state, and federal level. Many observers are quick to lump together the various teacher-voice organizations and fellowships, making the assumption that they are more alike than they are in reality. It is an easy mistake to make. These organizations look similar on the surface, and most have come into existence in the last half of the decade. The largest—Teach Plus—is just six years old.²⁵ The oldest—Center for Teaching Quality—just celebrated its 10th anniversary and has made substantial changes to its programs over the past year, rebranding the organization in a way that makes it nearly brand new.²⁶

But each organization functions in a unique way, and any other assumption diminishes the many voices in a diverse movement. That is to say, when joining the teacher-voice group, Educators 4 Excellence, or E4E, members sign a “Declaration of Teachers’ Principles and Beliefs”—a document detailing the organization’s and

members' vision for the teaching profession. This document allows the group to take stances on controversial issues in ways other groups cannot, and allows it to advocate directly for and mobilize around the issues that fall under the declaration document. VIVA Teachers, another teacher-voice group, by contrast, uses no screen for teachers to participate in its programming, which is based solely online. While E4E organizes locally, VIVA works nationally with more of a policy focus than an advocacy focus.

Teacher-voice organizations and fellowships operate under the premise that teacher voice is not monolithic

Each of these teacher-voice organizations and fellowships was formed, in part, to give teachers the opportunity to talk to each other outside of the opportunities afforded to them through their local unions or informal conversations among faculty at their schools. They provide teachers with another avenue to have their voices heard. Also, the groups are defined by the notion that the ideas of their members may not be in agreement with all teachers. Further, the leaders of most of these groups are quick to point out that even their own members disagree on many points. These groups accept—and in many ways, operate under—the notion that there are many teacher voices and not just one teacher voice.

Despite differences in structure, all of these teacher-voice organizations and fellowships are working on ways to professionalize the teaching profession

By giving more teachers more opportunities to engage and shape policies that affect their profession, teacher-voice organizations believe that they are working toward professionalizing the teaching profession. Elizabeth Evans, founder of VIVA Teachers (Voice, Ideas, Vision, Action), has experienced this push for professionalism in action:

We have seen over and over again this kind of light-bulb moment that management and union leadership alike have when they listen to ordinary classroom teachers talking about policy and they actually hear substance that's both reinforcing and adding nuance and depth to what they've already been thinking. I do think we have the opportunity to drive the professionalism of the profession again, and in some places it will open up opportunities to remind people that this is a profession, not a vocation.²⁷

Moreover, many teacher-voice organization and fellowship leaders believe that, due to changing demographics in teacher candidates, professionalizing teaching may be the only way to keep effective teachers in the classroom. Katherine Bassett, executive director of the National Network of State Teachers of the Year, makes the same point. According to Bassett, “As the Generation Y teachers are coming into the profession, they are looking for more than we can offer, and one of the things they’re looking for is career-advancement opportunities.” She says these teachers do not want to be doing the same thing in year five of their careers that they were doing in year one, but the current structure in the education profession does not provide them enough growth opportunities to allow for variance throughout their careers. “Many of these teachers and other teachers do not want to go into administration; they want to teach,” Bassett says. “However, they also want to lead, and we need to figure out how to provide them those opportunities.”²⁸

Technology is integral to all organizations and fellowships either as a driver of programs offered or as a link to connect participants

Social media and new technology give teachers a voice in ways that they have never had before, and teacher-voice organizations and fellowships are seizing the moment, using new forms of communication to share what is happening in schools, districts, and states across the United States. As is the case in other industries and professions, technology has allowed educators to share ideas and challenges around everything from lesson planning to fundraising to school policy to lobbying. Technology has also allowed teachers in a large district or a region, despite working in different and widely dispersed locations, to come together to consider policies and practices that affect them and then be empowered to take grassroots action.

Technology is particularly important to the organizations that run national programs allowing participants to take part in webinars to learn about policy, share experiences, and offer each other assistance without being in the same physical location. William Wong illustrates the importance of technology when he describes how he first came to be involved with the group through social media. “I can’t remember exactly where I came across E4E, though most likely it was through Twitter or a blog,”²⁹ Wong says. Educators 4 Excellence New York City member Vailala Salazar similarly first heard about E4E through social media, albeit a different platform: LinkedIn. “One of my colleagues invited Educators 4 Excellence to do a lunch at my school,” Salazar says. “She found out about them through LinkedIn and reached out to them because she wanted to learn more.”³⁰

All teacher-voice organizations and fellowships respect the history of unions and see them as powerful players with which to partner

Leaders of the teacher-voice organizations and fellowships recognize and respect the history of teachers unions and the power that unions have when it comes to ensuring that the work of teachers is heard in district, state, and federal education policy. In fact, many teachers involved in these new organizations are union members, and some are even union leaders. Yet all teacher-voice organizations recognize that, simply due to their existence, they are pushing unions to rethink the structures within which teachers can be heard. Jo Anderson says that with the new demands on teachers, unions need to work to support teachers in new ways, but that these new demands can become a human-capital issue within union ranks. According to Anderson:

What gets in the way is a staffing structure that has grown over time where unions hire people that have one set of skills, and with new demands on what teachers need and the ways they need support, that staffing system might not be prepared to meet those needs and therefore is resistant. When you don't have people with the right skills in place, that's a problem. So the unions are going to need to work to get the right supports and training to their staffs to do the things that, in fact, many of them want to do but do not currently know how to do.³¹

Teacher-voice organization and fellowship membership is diverse

Some observers assume that the membership of these organizations would largely be made up of younger, less-experienced teachers. Certain organizations such as Teach Plus have designed themselves to attract newer teachers,³² and some of the fellowships were created to support teachers at different stages in their careers. But the selection requirements of the various organizations and fellowships do not necessarily target younger, less-experienced teachers. In fact, many require a minimum amount of teaching experience and most screen their applicants in order to ensure diversity in everything from charter school teachers versus traditional public school teachers to the population of students taught to race and ethnicity of the teachers themselves. Other teacher-voice organizations and fellowships do not seek out a specific population of teachers, but have instead recruited membership of teachers across a broad range of experience and age.

Funding often comes from outside sources

A common criticism of the teacher-voice organizations and fellowships is that their groups and members are simply mouthpieces for the foundations and donors that fund them. Many of the groups are funded by big, national philanthropies such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation or the Joyce Foundation; some obtain solely local funding from region-specific foundations or civic groups; and yet others are funded by a combination of national and local funding. Still, others receive federal funds through federal grant-giving programs and/or state departments of education. Some seek out funding for individual projects such as specific teacher-evaluation policy reports, while other groups seek funding for overall operations without regard to specific projects they will work on. The teacher-voice organizations and fellowships are conscious of the criticism and say they are careful to stay independent. According to Evan Stone, co-founder of Educators 4 Excellence:

I hope this is something that people continue to check on us about. We tried to set up governance structures that would ensure that we're separating funding from policy and funding from organizational decisions. Do funders have agendas? Of course they do. If they see us fitting into their agenda, great. But they don't have any say over the direction of the organization.³³

Moreover, because many of these groups rely at least in part on outside funding, sustainability will certainly be an issue on the minds of teacher-voice organization and fellowship leaders. To diversify funding streams, some groups have started cost-sharing approaches to funding, others have members pay minimal dues, and some have looked to funding from government sources.

Organizations and fellowships overlap in some policy interests, but the mix is unique to each group

Many of the policies that the teacher-voice organizations and fellowships focus on are initiatives that many states and districts throughout the nation are uniformly concerned with as well, including teacher evaluation and the Common Core State Standards. It is possible that this overlap can be attributed to recent federal grant-giving programs that have encouraged new teacher-evaluation systems and an overwhelming agreement on the need for a standardized curriculum in many

state capitals. Other policy focus areas are of particular concerns to the members of each organization or fellowship and are often targeted to either the mission of the organization or fellowship or the local context in which each of these organizations and fellowship work.

FIGURE 1
Policy spotlight: Teacher-voice organizations and fellowships

	Common Core State Standards	Distribution of effective teachers	Education technology and 21st-century learning	Federal-policy initiatives (Race to the Top, the RESPECT project, etc.)	“Last In, First Out” teacher layoff policies	Learning time in school	School safety	Career ladders for teachers	Teacher-evaluation policies	Teacher-professional-development policies
Teacher-voice organizations										
Teach Plus	X	X			X			X	X	
Educators 4 Excellence	X				X			X	X	
VIVA Teachers	X					X	X		X	
Center for Teaching Quality	X		X					X	X	
National Network of State Teachers of the Year	X							X	X	X
Teacher-voice fellowships										
America Achieves Fellowship for Teachers and Principals	X		X					X	X	X
Hope Street Group National Teacher Fellowship	X								X	X
U.S. Department of Education Teaching Ambassador Fellowship				X						

*This is not a comprehensive list of all the policies that teacher-voice organizations and fellowships are working on. Rather, it is a list of select policies chosen by the author.

Profiles: Teacher-voice organizations

The following are organizations solely dedicated to teacher voice. Most of these organizations run several different programs to engage teachers in education policy.

Teach Plus³⁴

Founded: Officially incorporated in 2009 (piloted in 2007)

Founder: Celine Coggins

Membership: 12,211³⁵

Mission: To improve outcomes for urban children by ensuring that a greater proportion of students have access to effective, experienced teachers

What makes it unique: Teach Plus programs focus on demonstrably effective urban teachers in the second stage of their careers—years 3 through 10—who want to continue classroom teaching while also expanding their impact as leaders in their schools and in national, state, and district policy

Issue areas: Common Core State Standards, teacher evaluation, career ladders for teachers, “Last In, First Out” lay-off policies, and distribution of effective teachers

Funding: Half of its funds come from government sources (RTT, TIF, and SIG), in addition to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York, Noyce Foundation, Boston Foundation, W. Clement & Jessie V. Stone Foundation, Joyce Foundation, Central Indiana Community Foundation, Ayres Foundation, Chicago Public Education Fund, Wasserman Foundation, and the CityBridge Foundation

Locations: Cities, no states: Greater Boston, Chicago, Indianapolis, Los Angeles, Memphis, and Washington, D.C.

Source: Author’s interviews and independent research.

When Celine Coggins told her parents—both of whom are public school teachers—that she wanted to follow in their footsteps and become a teacher, Coggins remembers them both becoming visibly upset. “They told me that teaching was not for smart and ambitious people, and within a few years into being a teacher I understood what they meant,” she says. Coggins points out that, “There were

very few growth opportunities and as I looked to expand my impact beyond my classroom, I realized that in order to get growth experiences, you generally needed to leave the classroom.”³⁶

Coggins left the classroom and got involved in policy, and while doing this work, she had another epiphany. “I learned there are huge gaps between folks who are implementing policy on the ground and folks who are making those decisions,” she says. Coggins’ own experience led her to create an organization to bridge that gap between policymakers and teachers, with the goal of creating leadership opportunities that would keep them in the classroom. The organization is Teach Plus, and its mission is to improve outcomes for urban children by ensuring that a greater proportion of students have access to effective, experienced teachers.

Teach Plus is different from other teacher-voice organizations in that it focuses on urban educators who have taught for at least three years and no more than 10, though not all members of Teach Plus are in this range of experience.³⁷ “Because our theory of action revolves around trying to create the kinds of incentives and opportunities that are going to keep great teachers committed, that’s the period of time we lose teachers, so that’s the period of time we really focus on,” Coggins says.

Teach Plus offers three distinct programs, two of which have teacher-voice components: the Teaching Policy Fellows, which requires an application, and the T+ Network program, which does not. The Teaching Policy Fellowship spans two years and trains current classroom teachers in education policy and research.³⁸ Teach Plus screens for effective teachers for the fellowship and also tries to diversify each group of fellows based on racial and ethnic backgrounds, grade level, subjects taught, and other diversity screens. The fellows meet at least once a month and are often joined by education-policy decision makers at the local, state, and federal levels. Coggins explains that the fellows are given the tools to advance their own agenda for change and improvement in their city or state.

The T+ Network evolves as teachers attend events hosted by Teach Plus, get on the email listserv, and start interacting with the organization around issues and action.³⁹ This informal and larger group gives Teach Plus leaders the opportunity to connect a larger network of teachers to policymakers. They do so through public events that usually feature a policymaker talking to teachers about education-policy topics; those attending get to weigh in on the topics presented through audience-response technology that allows for near-instant feedback. Teach Plus also offers a host of webinars for the larger T+ Network.

Regardless of how teachers connect to the organization, Teach Plus encourages them to have their voice heard through various media outlets. Last year, Teach Plus teachers had 210 media placements in print, online, television, and radio, and are currently on track to surpass that number this year. What's more, 24 Teach Plus teachers just finished collaborating on writing a book, titled, *The Real Experts: How Great Teachers Would Fix America's Schools*, which will be published this fall by Harvard Education Press.⁴⁰

Coggins says that Teach Plus views teachers unions as critical partners. This spring Teach Plus teamed with the National Education Association to launch Assessment Advisor, a website similar to Yelp.com, for teachers to talk about student assessments.⁴¹ Because some assessments are better than others, teachers might be able to identify and more fully share ideas about which assessment tools are working and which are not, instead of repeating the more common conversation surrounding assessment, which is, either you like it or you don't. Partnerships such as these bring Teach Plus teachers together with teachers unions to engage more teachers in projects that can benefit all in the profession. According to Coggins:

I think one of the stereotypes that the union is trying to move beyond is the squeaky wheel, complaining teacher as the most vocal member of the union. We know that teachers coming into the profession really want to feel a part of a professional association, and to a small degree, we offer that. The union can be a larger and more powerful example of that, but there are some transitions they need to make.⁴²

Teach Plus obtains slightly more than 50 percent of its funding from government grant-giving programs such as Race To the Top, with the other half coming from philanthropy organizations.⁴³ Coggins believes a lot of the criticism around the funding of teacher-voice organizations—due to the fact that some question the motives of corporate leaders' interest in education reform—is because many of them receive funds from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. She notes that Teach Plus had been in existence for more than two years before being funded by the Gates Foundation, but that Teach Plus and the Gates Foundation have similar agendas. “By the time we got funding from Gates, we had a well-established point of view, but that point of view is actually quite similar to the Gates Foundation's because it's based on research,” Coggins says.

Coggins believes the teacher-voice movement grew out of a desire of a new set of teachers who wanted opportunities to connect direct teaching experience with the bigger picture of education reform that can change educational outcomes for all

students. “A lot of teachers go into teaching for social-justice reasons; they want to change the world,” she says. Connecting how teaching can do just that will be important to the movement, Coggins believes.

Educators 4 Excellence⁴⁴

Founded: Spring 2010 (officially incorporated in summer 2010)

Founders: Sydney Morris and Evan Stone

Membership: More than 10,000

Mission: To ensure that the voices of classroom teachers are included in the decisions that affect the teaching profession and students

What makes it unique: Emphasis on grassroots organizing, advocacy and mobilization focused, and a Declaration of Teachers’ Principles and Beliefs

Issue areas: Common Core State Standards, career ladders for teachers, teacher evaluation, “Last In, First Out” lay-off policies, early childhood policies, and teacher-preparation policies

Funding: More than 65 major local and national foundations and individual supporters, including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; Broad Foundation; Laura and John Arnold Foundation; Carnegie Corporation of New York; United Way of Greater Los Angeles; Robin Hood Foundation; Peter and Carmen Lucia Buck Foundation; Simon Foundation; Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi, or RKMC; Foundation for Children; Minneapolis Foundation; and the Saint Paul Foundation

Locations: New York City, Los Angeles, Minnesota, and Connecticut

Source: Author’s interviews and independent research.

Educators 4 Excellence, or E4E, was conceived during a long subway ride from the East Village to the Bronx in New York City during the 2009-10 school year.⁴⁵ Founders Evan Stone and Sydney Morris were teaching at the same school, and on their way to and from work each day, they expressed similar feelings of discontent about their ability to make an impact outside of their own classrooms in their school and district. According to Stone:

What we found is that as we got more confident in our classrooms and in our teaching, we wanted to have a broader impact. We wanted to have a voice and had a hard time doing that in our school, which was very set in its ways, or in our district, or in the union, because in New York City, all of these are these massive institutions. So I wouldn’t expect us to be heard necessarily, but we couldn’t even find an outlet to try.⁴⁶

Stone and Morris started talking to other teachers in schools across the New York City school district to determine if their experiences were somehow unique to their particular situation. At the time, the two were considering other ways to have a greater voice, from starting their own school, to changing schools, to simply trying to find ways to innovate in their profession. According to Stone:

I was really frustrated by the lack of opportunities for professional growth. What we kept hearing from teachers is that it was the same for them. Regardless of how long they taught or where they'd been teaching, they felt like they didn't get the support or the resources to be as effective as they could be. They didn't get meaningful feedback. They didn't get recognized when they excelled. But underlying all of these things was the similar idea of "I don't have a voice."⁴⁷

Stone and Morris began convening colleagues from across the city to explore the possibility of formalizing a group of teachers who had it as their mission to discuss and act upon policies that affect the teaching profession. After several meetings, Stone, Morris, and 12 other teachers decided to create a document that would detail their aspirations for the teaching profession and ask other teachers to get involved with their group by signing on. "It became clear that we needed something to unite us—we needed to know what we stood for," Stone explains. "We didn't want to say to teachers, 'join us,' and not know what that meant to join." So Stone and Morris wrote down their beliefs about the teaching profession—a bullet-point list detailing everything from teacher recruitment to dismissal. They called the list their "Declaration of Principles and Beliefs."⁴⁸ Months later, the declaration would serve as the catalyst in incorporating Educators 4 Excellence into an official organization, and years later, it would remain unchanged as the organization grew from a handful of teachers in New York City to thousands across the United States. "We haven't changed a word of it since we wrote it," Stone says of their original declaration.

Educators 4 Excellence has been criticized for its Declaration of Principles and Beliefs. Critics claim that the group appeals to teachers who share the education-policy beliefs in the declaration about the teaching profession and discourages those with differing views to join. But Stone covets the document, and many view it as a way to differentiate E4E from other teacher-voice groups. According to Stone:

It allows us to take a stance on issues because everybody [who joins E4E] has had a baseline agreement. It's a starting place for solutions-oriented conversations. The ideas on the declaration are broad, and E4E teachers believe in these

*core set of principles, but we figure out the details together. We recognize that not every single teacher believes in these ideas, but we represent a large and growing body of teachers who want to be a part of creating that change.*⁴⁹

Educators 4 Excellence officially incorporated as an organization in August 2010, beginning in New York City, and today has more than 10,000 members nationally with official chapters in four regions throughout the United States.⁵⁰ Fifty percent of the group's members have five or more years of teaching experience, and 20 percent have 10 or more years of experience. In addition, 87 percent of its members teach at traditional public schools.⁵¹ E4E members get involved through a process known as “learn, network, and take action,” and it works like this: E4E provides reading materials and workshops to help its members become better informed about education policy and politics; members then network with other teachers through E4E events and networking discussions and panels; and finally, members take action through writing, organizing, and through other avenues to affect change legislatively, contractually, or by a plethora of other ways through school, district, or state-level policies.⁵²

In the 2010-11 school year, E4E teachers wrote their first policy papers on the topics of teacher evaluation and seniority-based layoffs. At the same time, New York City was wrestling with the prospect of laying off thousands of teachers due to budget cuts. E4E teachers met with New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and members of the state legislature to present their ideas for how to alleviate the impact of quality-blind layoffs, or when teachers are laid off regardless of their performance in the classroom. Those ideas were adopted by lawmakers and became Senate Bill 3501, which was passed by the state Senate. The E4E proposal suggested three levers for teacher layoffs: chronic absenteeism, teachers with multiple unsatisfactory evaluations, and teachers who were in the absent-teacher reserve pool for more than six months.⁵³ But in the end, the New York State Legislature dropped the issue after New York City found funding to allow all teachers to keep their jobs. “New York was able to move enough money around to avert layoffs,” Stone says. “Even so, our teachers fostered a serious debate about how we keep great teachers in our classrooms even in the most dire of economic circumstances.” Nonetheless, through this process, E4E gained momentum, and its membership exploded in 2011 from 500 teachers to nearly 2,000 teachers.

Educators 4 Excellence's first real policy win came in early 2012 when its suggestions for the appeals process for teacher evaluation were incorporated into the agreement led by New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo (D) to settle a final sticking

point between the New York City schools and teachers union.⁵⁴ This resulted in a major jump in E4E membership and a call from teachers in Los Angeles to continue similar work on the opposite coast.

Stone sees Educators 4 Excellence and other teacher-voice groups as avenues for teachers to get more involved in their unions. According to Stone:

*Unions are fundamentally important to the education system, and collective bargaining is a key process for teachers to be involved in shaping policy. However, very small percentages of teachers are currently active in their unions. I hope that we help encourage teachers to see their unions as a lever for positive change.*⁵⁵

E4E recently started a chapter in Minnesota, is soon launching in Connecticut, and has been contacted by teachers in many other cities, states, and regions throughout the United States who want to start similar organizations. “We can build movements of teachers to help drive change in their local context that are aligned in this broader movement of an elevated teaching profession,” Stone says.

VIVA Teachers (Voice, Ideas, Vision, Action)⁵⁶

Founded: September 2011

Founder: Elizabeth Evans

Membership: 3,500 virtual members, having done work in Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Illinois, Massachusetts, North Carolina, New Jersey, New York, Tennessee, and Texas

Mission: To increase the volume of the teachers’ voice in policy-making, with the ultimate goal of positioning teachers as the go-to resources for education policymakers needing ideas, suggestions, and authentic experiences

What makes it unique: VIVA Teachers is an online organization that uses technology as an organizing tool for teachers to participate in a virtual “Ideas Exchange”

Issue areas: Learning time in school, professional evaluations (teacher and principal), Common Core State Standards, and school safety

Funding: The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Walton Family Foundation, Joyce Foundation, Minnesota Department of Education, Chicago Public Education Fund, National Education Association, Massachusetts Teachers Association, Iowa State Education Association, and the Ford Foundation

Locations: Online only

Source: Author’s interviews and independent research.

VIVA Teachers is the brainchild of Elizabeth Evans, who had been the executive director of the Illinois Network of Charter Schools. In that job Evans noticed a lack of teacher representation in policy conversations. When she began to ask teachers about it, she found that many didn't feel there was an outlet for their voice in policy discussions. "Yet when you talk to teachers, they have a lot of strong opinions," Evans says. "So it seemed like a natural opportunity to create a new avenue for teachers to get involved in policy."⁵⁷

The cornerstone of VIVA is the "VIVA Idea Exchange," an open, online platform designed for teachers to give their input on education policy during a specific window of time. Each VIVA Idea Exchange is themed and is mostly locally targeted, except for a few national exchanges VIVA has conducted. "We saw more and more how technology was changing the way people connect and engage," Evans says. "We knew we had the opportunity to bridge that gap with teachers with an online platform that is used for a particular short-term, outcome-oriented kind of crowdsourcing." To accommodate teachers' busy schedules, VIVA Idea Exchanges are 24 hours a day, every day, until the exchange ends. Participants can share their thoughts on the particular topic of the exchange by posting an idea, commenting on other educators' ideas, or voting for or against ideas.

Unlike other teacher-voice organizations, VIVA does not in any way screen teachers who wish to participate. For two projects around teacher and principal evaluations in Minnesota, for example, nearly 500 teachers and principals participated in the VIVA Idea Exchange statewide, with a 10 percent participation overlap between the two projects.⁵⁸ To solicit participants, VIVA reaches out to educators through technology-based platforms from email to all forms of social media. VIVA also forms relationships with other education organizations in areas where they're working to get the word out about their projects. For a project in Chicago, for example, VIVA asked fellow teacher-voice organization, Teach Plus, to promote the project to its networks.⁵⁹

Because of its social-media outreach and online structure, Evans expected that many VIVA Idea Exchange participants would be younger, more tech-savvy teachers who had fewer years of experience, but a large number of participants—44 percent—have between 10 and 20 years of teaching experience.⁶⁰ "I think because we're not defining any criteria on the kind of teacher we're looking for and we're not defining ourselves as a representative body, nor are we exactly random sampling because there is self-selection in who participates, I think we're getting a broader spectrum of teachers to participate," Evans says.

During the VIVA Idea Exchange, folks at VIVA measure the frequency of online participation and then invite a small group of the highly involved Ideas Exchange participants, typically a group of 5 to 15 teachers, to join the next step in the VIVA process: the Writing Collaborative. Working together online, the participants in the Writing Collaborative pick themes from their peers in the VIVA Idea Exchange, reflect upon them, test them against research and practice, and, finally, put together a detailed report. The collaborative then delivers the ideas from the report directly to local, state, and/or federal public-policy officials—whichever makes the most sense for the topic of the report. In addition to presenting report findings to public-policy officials, VIVA pushes the report out to education policy and advocacy groups as well as local teachers unions.

To fulfill particular project goals, VIVA works with all interested parties, from teachers unions to district management. According to Evans, partnerships with the unions often happen on state-level projects. “We’ve had successful projects with unions that have leaders who understand the need to add more capacity around providing resources around policy and practice and not simply workplace and collective bargaining,” Evans says. Recently, VIVA partnered with the NEA for a school-safety project and in April of this year, 11 VIVA members, who are also NEA members, presented their ideas from their Writing Collaborative to NEA President Dennis Van Roekel, his senior staff, and to Secretary of Education Duncan’s senior staff.⁶¹ The report the VIVA Writing Collaborative teachers presented, “Sensible Solutions for Safer Schools,” included recommendations for better professional development for teachers on educating the whole child and implementing a “pro-hero” rather than an “anti-bully” curriculum.⁶² Previously, VIVA partnered with Iowa’s state teachers union for a teacher-leadership project. The report produced as part of that project was approved and adopted by the union board’s governing council and leadership as an official position of the union.⁶³ “It is an example of where the union is trying to provide a more nuanced policy positioning and engage their membership in new ways,” Evans says.

The projects that VIVA undertakes, and geographic areas where it chooses to work, are largely decided on by the political will of decision makers in states and districts. “Our screen is people in positions of authority—decision makers and policymakers—who are genuinely interested and willing to listen to teachers’ voice,” Evans says. Since its inception, VIVA has conducted 10 Ideas Exchanges and has narrowed its focus to four policy areas: learning time in school, professional evaluations (teacher and principal), Common Core State Standards, and school safety. VIVA projects are funded per project by various grantees. At first,

Evans used her connections in the education world to obtain funding, but now, VIVA has developed a cost-sharing approach with partner organizations on a project-by-project basis.

Evans notes that in order for VIVA and other teacher-voice organizations to function and have impact, it is important that they continue to gain traction. “We [teacher-voice groups] need to continue to demonstrate that teachers can have substantive, thoughtful, productive, policy-driven opinions and ideas, and that they can use them to inform practice, because good policies make for better practice in and of themselves,” Evans says.

Center for Teaching Quality⁶⁴

Founded: 1999 as the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, and in 2003 as Teacher Leaders Network

Founder: Barnett Berry

Membership: More than 2,000

Mission: To connect, ready, and mobilize teacher leaders to transform schools

What makes it unique: Distinct “Geo Labs” with a national online platform called the “Collaboratory;” includes space for conversation with non-educators

Issue areas: Teacher evaluation, Common Core State Standards, 21st-century learning, innovative leadership, and school redesign

Funding: The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Joyce Foundation, Stuart Foundation, Rose Community Foundation, MetLife Foundation, and the Kentucky Department of Education

Locations of Geo Labs: Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Washington, and Kentucky, although the Center for Teaching Quality is largely a virtual organization

Source: Author’s interviews and independent research.

In March 2013 the Center for Teaching Quality, or CTQ, celebrated its “teacher-leader community’s” 10th anniversary, but over those 10 years this organization has had a patchwork kind of growth, with new arms of the organization rising and later being aligned with the larger community.⁶⁵ CTQ began in 1999 as the Southeast Center for Teacher Quality and rebranded in 2003 as the Teacher Leaders Network, an electronic mailing list, or listserv, of nearly 250 teachers, which provided a virtual meeting space for teachers throughout the country to share best practices, talk about leadership opportunities, and offer ways to extend their work beyond their own

classrooms.⁶⁶ At its inception, CTQ's goal was to connect teachers in order to break down the barriers of isolation felt by many in the profession.

After several years of success at virtually connecting teachers, CTQ moved its focus to geographic locations to build a critical mass of teachers who could connect in person while continuing the online conversation. In 2009, in addition to its virtual community representing 46 states, CTQ started the New Millennium Initiative, or NMI, in four geographic sites, which quickly grew to five: Denver, Colorado; Puget Sound, Washington; the Bay Area of California; Illinois; and Hillsborough County, Florida. Teachers involved in NMI work to develop education-policy-analyst skills and learn ways to advocate for effective teaching policies at the local, state, and federal levels. The avenues NMI teachers take to get their voices heard vary with each policy and geographic area. Denver NMI teachers, for example, suggested revisions to Colorado's teacher-evaluation legislation in a 2011 report, "Making Teacher Evaluation Work for Students: Voices from the Classroom." Meanwhile, NMI teachers in Hillsborough County are working on video-based learning communities, engaging teachers in 12 different Hillsborough County schools. This spring saw the effort beginning to spread to other Florida districts as well.⁶⁷

Recently, CTQ rebranded the New Millennium Initiative and its virtual community as CTQ Colorado, CTQ Florida, CTQ Illinois, and CTQ Washington, and are referred to as CTQ's "Geo Labs." Alesah Daughtrey, CTQ's director of partnership and professional learning, explains the rebranding:

We've gone to states rather than to districts or more city-specific names because as the number of engaged teachers grows, the geographic range of these groups is going well beyond the specific district or even sometimes specific clusters of districts in a metro area. We help those teachers learn together and then lead together, and while initially a lot of the NMI work was focused on teaching-policy issues, in particular teacher evaluation, today those teams are working on a whole host of issues, some of which have a lot more to do with pedagogical innovations than anything else.

The virtual community has been rebranded as CTQ's "Collaboratory" and is open to teachers as well as all other professionals interested in education with the idea of sharing thoughts across platforms. Through the Collaboratory, teachers can also take part in teacher-targeted content labs where educators connect online to

work on specific projects such as Common Core State Standards implementation or 21st-century learning techniques. According to Daughtrey, the Collaboratory's tagline—"We spark connections. You create solutions."—encourages teachers to innovate to create bold ideas to move the profession forward.

All are welcome to join in the conversation on CTQ's Collaboratory, but CTQ screens the content-lab facilitators as well as Geo Lab participants. "We have had a pretty rigorous screening process for our core team members for the Geo Labs in particular," Daughtrey says. CTQ is concerned with keeping its communities talking about solutions rather than having them become places where the conversation strays from education policy.

In 2011 CTQ's founder Barnett Berry co-authored *Teaching 2030*, a book about the future of the teaching profession, with 12 CTQ teachers. Along with recommendations for improving school finance, working conditions, teacher preparation, and accountability, the co-authors call for teachers unions to reform as, what they call "professional guilds."⁶⁸ Berry contends that it is "time for teacher leaders to press forward the discussion about transforming unions into professional guilds that seek not only to maintain but to advance public education as the cornerstone of our democracy."⁶⁹ Adding to Berry's point, Daughtrey explains that CTQ works closely with unions as "critical friends" in their work of creating teacher leaders who are working to envision their profession in new, innovative ways.

CTQ defines success with their initiatives in couple of ways, including the number of participating members, but the group also monitors the number of their teachers who move from learning about policy and advocacy work into acting upon what they've learned, including those who have stepped into leadership positions. "I think the idea of expanding and spreading is important to us, but we also really judge success from how many teachers move from learning into action as engaged, active teacher leaders," Daughtrey says.

This year, authors Berry, Ann Byrd, and Alan Wieder, plan to release *Teacherpreneurs*, a book that details how teachers can take on leadership opportunities such as those offered through CTQ, without leaving their classroom-teaching responsibilities and become what they call, "teacherpreneurs"—the equivalent of small-business founders. The book provides recommendations for implementing a new, transformative type of teacher leadership and includes a how-to section for selecting, supporting, and sustaining teacherpreneurs.⁷⁰

National Network of State Teachers of the Year⁷¹

Founded: October 2012

Executive Director: Katherine Bassett

Membership: More than 700

Mission: To serve as a professional organization for State Teachers of the Year in their years of service following their Year of Recognition when they serve as their state's Teacher of the Year

What makes it unique: A hub for State Teachers of the Year to stay involved in education policy and advocacy after their year of recognition

Issue areas: Teacher continuums, teacher leadership, teacher professional development, and Common Core State Standards

Funding: The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Educational Testing Service, NEA Foundation, and membership dues

Locations: Members are from every state, the District of Columbia, and several U.S. territories, in addition to the U.S. Department of Defense Education Administration

Source: Author's interviews and independent research.

Two and a half years ago, a group of former State Teachers of the Year shared a desire for a professional organization that would serve as a home for them and their colleagues to continue capitalizing on what they learned during their year as State Teacher of the Year, and had several meetings to explore the idea. Their discussions bore fruit in the fall of 2012 when the National State Teachers of the Year organization was revitalized. The previously established nonprofit organization served primarily as an alumni and service-oriented organization for State Teachers of the Year. The newly renamed National Network of State Teachers of the Year, or NNSTOY, now has a new focus on education policy and advocacy, in addition to its traditional emphasis on service.

NNSTOY's members have been recognized as a State Teacher of the Year for the state or U.S. entity where they teach before entering what is called their "year of recognition." That year is filled with activities sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers including, but not limited to, training in education policy and advocacy, media, and public speaking. Prior to the shift in the national organization's focus six months ago, State Teachers of the Year had neither a collective organization from which to continue to advocate for policies and practices nor a voice in the public conversation. "At the end of the year of recognition, many State Teachers of the Year come out the other side feeling that they're all dressed

up with no place to grow,” says Katherine Bassett, New Jersey State Teacher of the Year in 2000 and executive director of NNSTOY.

The transition from a service-oriented organization to one focused on education policy was a natural shift for NNSTOY, Bassett explains. After her year of recognition as New Jersey State Teacher of the Year, Bassett continued working with the program and its parent organization, the National State Teachers of the Year, and over the next decade saw an enormous change in what newly minted State Teachers of the Year knew about policy when they were selected. Bassett attributes this shift in part to the availability of information and resources through social media. “Virtually all of our State Teachers of the Year are on Facebook or Twitter, and they’re barraged with knowledge and information,” she says. According to Bassett, after learning so much during their year of recognition, State Teachers of the Year are only hungrier to continue making their mark in the education policy and advocacy world, as they enter into what NNSTOY calls their “years of service” after their year of recognition.

Through NNSTOY, members are able to participate in research projects, working with partners such as Center for Educator Effectiveness at Pearson and the American Institutes for Research. NNSTOY currently works under a committee structure so when an organization member wants to get involved with a research project, they can join its research committee. Bassett expects that as the organization grows, it may have to move to an application process for various projects. This summer NNSTOY will release their first white paper on what they’ve deemed the “five missing structures in teaching that keep it from being viewed as a true profession.”⁷² Their second white paper, which is just getting underway, will focus on the current state of teacher leadership.

NNSTOY members will also have the opportunity to lead “virtual circles”—online communities created to allow members to connect with other educators who have similar interests, and explore a topic in depth. While one must be a State Teacher of the Year to facilitate the virtual circles, anyone can join the discussion forum. NNSTOY also offers monthly webinars led by education experts, including Charlotte Danielson, Rick Hess, and Rachel Curtis, which are open to the broader public. This summer NNSTOY is hosting its first conference that will focus on the critical relationships that successful teacher-leaders build with five groups of stakeholders: colleagues, students, policymakers, key influencers, and communities. The conference is open to all educators, and State Teachers of the Year are encouraged to invite teachers from their schools.

NNSTOY members and leaders work closely with the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers. In particular, NNSTOY teachers are working with the NEA on projects related to teacher leadership and building career-ladder structures for teachers, or what NNSTOY refers to as “career continuums.” Meanwhile, the AFT has provided assistance in research around the career continuums, in which NNSTOY is engaged with Public Impact, a nonprofit organization focused on improving learning outcomes for all children in the United States, and Pearson. “The unions look to us as teacher leaders and we look to them for information and for assistance so we have good relationship with both,” Bassett says.

Though NNSTOY experienced its “rebirth” less than a year ago, Bassett is confident that the organization is headed in a direction that will help elevate teacher voice. “The most exciting thing is that we have a unique opportunity right now to truly impact teaching and to help professionalize it,” she says. She believes the time is ripe for organizations such as NNSTOY. “We have an opportunity to help grow other teacher leaders and to create a powerful force within the profession to help change it from within,” Bassett says.

Profiles: Teacher-voice fellowships

The following fellowships are branches of organizations that run other programs in addition to teacher-voice efforts. These organizations include: America Achieves, a nonprofit advancing high-quality education systems, which launched the America Achieves Fellowship for Teachers and Principals; the Hope Street Group, which after several years as a nonprofit dedicated to health care, jobs, and the workforce, as well as education, created the National Teacher Fellowship; and the U.S. Department of Education’s Teaching Ambassador Fellowship, which began at the suggestion of a teacher who at the time was a White House fellow.

Let’s look at each more closely.

America Achieves: America Achieves Fellowship for Teachers and Principals, or AAFTP ⁷³

Founded: September 2010

Fellowship director: Sibyll Carnochan Catalan

Membership (number of fellows, past and present): 107 fellows—81 teachers and 26 principals—representing 27 states and the District of Columbia

Mission: To influence practice, policy, and the public conversation to create world-class schools for all students

What makes it unique: Fellowship is intentionally aimed at both teachers and principals—“Matchmaker Model”

Issue areas: Common Core State Standards (creation and implementation), teacher professionalism (evaluation, compensation, and career ladders), and education technology

Funding: Bloomberg Philanthropies, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Laura and John Arnold Foundation, and the Noyce Foundation

Location: See membership above

Source: Author’s interviews and independent research.

The America Achieves Fellowship for Teachers and Principals, or AAFTP, began in September 2010 with a cohort of 50 teachers and principals. In 2012 it expanded with the addition of 60 more fellows. Today AAFT has fellows in 27 states and 50 districts throughout the United States.⁷⁴ The AAFTP is in the process of determining its growth model—most founding fellows have decided to stay on, but AAFTP is considering a “graduation program” that exits fellows out of the program after a predetermined amount of time.

In its selection process, AAFTP looks for teachers and principals who are highly effective in their schools and districts, but the group also deliberately focuses on ensuring a diverse cohort. AAFTP recruits purposefully so its fellows represent the wide range of teachers in the profession: from years of experience to teachers in traditional and charter schools to content area to union membership or leadership to race and ethnicity. The intent is to avoid the trap of having two or three distinct groups of teachers who could organize themselves around one aspect of their jobs. “The mantra that we use is that we’re ‘all in this together’ and that we will come up with the best solutions if we learn how to listen deeply to people with different opinions and move forward, even with differences,” says Sibyll Carnochan Catalan, executive director of AAFTP.

AAFTP fellows are expected to undertake individual or group “impact projects” that influence practice, policy, and the public conversation in their respective states and districts. Based on their area of impact, AAFTP fellows receive training, connections, and guidance for their particular projects from the staff at America Achieves. Beyond that, the AAFTP convenes two on-site group conferences per year for its fellows and hosts webinars and mini-conferences around specific policy issues such as the Common Core State Standards or teacher evaluation.

America Achieves does not have a predetermined set of policy initiatives for fellows, but rather it encourages fellows to choose policy topics based on individual interest. “We don’t, as a fellowship, have a particular opinion or agenda about what policies the fellows themselves should espouse,” Carnochan Catalan says. AAFTP instead acts as a “matchmaker” in an effort to pair educators with current policy topics. The National Governors Association, for example, approached America Achieves about having an AAFTP principal and teacher speak with governors about using student-achievement data in formative assessments. “So we looked through the expertise and skills of our fellows and we could have picked 50 of them, but we sent two to speak with the NGA,” Carnochan Catalan says. “We don’t tell them what they should say about it; we match them with the opportunities to say what they think.”

Beyond individual projects and group, in-person conferences, and online meetings, AAFTP introduces fellows to policymakers and thought leaders across the country. In some cases, AAFTP fellows have provided advice to policymakers. According to Carnochan Catalan, AAFTP fellows have had discussions with national leaders, including Secretary of Education Duncan, Rep. George Miller (D-CA), Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper (D), New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, District of Columbia Public Schools Chancellor Kaya Henderson, Los Angeles Unified School District Superintendent John Deasy, as well as others. In addition, two fellows are members of the Gates Foundation Teacher Advisory Council, a three-year commitment that affords fellows the opportunity to advise the Gates Foundation policy initiatives.⁷⁵

And while AAFTP fellows are working with their local unions on individual impact projects, AAFTP's position on teachers unions remains neutral. "We do deliberately bring union voice into our events as one piece of the conversation because it's critical, and historically [unions] have played an important role, but we don't have an opinion about whether folks should or should not get involved in their unions," Carnochan Catalan says. AAFTP has formed relationships with other teacher-voice groups and has worked most closely with the Hope Street Group and Teach Plus. In a partnership with Teach Plus, America Achieves created a Common Core webinar for Teach Plus fellows, and in turn, Teach Plus helped America Achieves develop specific policy skills and knowledge for their respective impact projects.

As for what is next in the teacher-voice movement, Carnochan Catalan cannot make a prediction. "I will say we have people in tears when our conferences end because they get the energy and connections that they need to go back to their classrooms and schools where sometimes they feel alone," Carnochan Catalan says. "When they're with their peer group in the fellowship they don't feel alone and they feel like they can keep going and stay a classroom teacher and school principal, but I can't tell you 5 to 10 years, I don't know yet."

Hope Street Group: National Teacher Fellowship⁷⁶

Founded: May 2011

Fellowship director: Wendy Uptain

Membership (number of fellows, past and present): 25—13 in the first year, 12 in the second year—representing 10 states and the District of Columbia

Mission: To transform the teaching profession and improve outcomes for students by spreading implementation of widely accepted and effective educator-evaluation programs built with the involvement and input of teachers

What makes it unique: Fellowship that is nationally organized with a focus in one state, detailed program with scaffolded training and skill building, each fellow has an individual project, designed to directly impact their particular school, district, or state

Issue areas: Teacher effectiveness, Common Core State Standards, and teacher professional development

Funding: The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York, and Rodel Foundation of Delaware

Locations: See membership above

Source: Author's interviews and independent research.

The Hope Street Group's National Teacher Fellowship grew out of a 2009 teacher-evaluation project that brought together teacher leaders from across the country to develop a policy paper. When the Hope Street Group decided to create a formal teacher-fellowship program in 2011, they called upon several of the teachers from the 2009 group to be part of the fellowship's inaugural year. According to Wendy Uptain, deputy director of teacher engagement at the Hope Street Group, the fellowship is meant to build teacher leaders by providing fellows with both the skills and experiences needed to engage with and directly impact the development of policy around the issue of teacher evaluation.⁷⁷

In its first year—which ended up extending into an 18-month fellowship—the teacher fellows focused mostly on helping the Hope Street Group develop its “Teacher Evaluation Playbook,” an online tool that provides strategy suggestions for effective educator-evaluation reform to state policymakers while at the same time giving administrators, union leaders, and teachers suggestions on how they can get involved.⁷⁸ With the second fellowship class, the Hope Street Group is working to expand fellows' experiences beyond the Teacher Evaluation Playbook by having them work on teacher-evaluation design and implementation in their respective schools, districts, and states.

The Hope Street Group opened its 2013 National Teacher Fellowship application to all teachers across the country, but targeted its promotion of the program in states that have current or upcoming teacher-evaluation policies. States that won Race to the Top money also took promotional precedence. In the end, nearly 100 teachers representing 27 states applied for the Hope Street Group's 12 fellowship slots.⁷⁹ The application consisted of a letter of recommendation and five narrative-response questions. Finalists were then interviewed by phone and the 12 fellows were then selected.

Most of fellowship's opportunities and communication takes place online, with a handful of in-person meetings throughout the year. The focus of the 2013 fellowship is local policy. According to Uptain, "If you are going to make an impact nationally and be able to share something with each other, it depends really on what you're doing in your own state." The first three months of the fellowship exposed teachers to current teacher-evaluation policies and how to engage with policy design and implementation through media; learning how to advocate for policy through social media, opinion pieces, letters to the editor, and more; and learning how to share their knowledge with policymakers. The program also encourages fellows to complete an individual project during the fellowship. "Everyone's project is going to look a little bit different, depending on where they're at because states and districts are so different in where they are in teacher evaluations," Uptain says.

Leaders of the Hope Street Group's National Teachers Fellowship view it as another avenue for teachers to have their voices heard, recognizing that, to date, teachers unions have been the sole voice for teachers. "We value the input of every stakeholder and that includes unions," Uptain says. "We loop in all different stakeholders with the goal of developing better policy by having all of the voices involved." In fact, many past and current fellows are union members, including some who are union representatives for their schools or districts. One of this year's fellows is even a local union president.

Moving forward, the Hope Street Group intends to continue anchoring its fellowship in substantive policy experiences and opportunities, with teacher evaluation being at the center of the fellowship for the foreseeable future. According to Uptain, "It's key to remember that just having teachers be a part of things right now because we're in the implementation and design stage doesn't mean that there is not going to be a need for teachers later on as we go forward with revamping these things and improving them."

Moreover, the Hope Street Group is expanding the fellowship's impact by launching a state fellowship modeled after its national effort. Recently, the Hope Street Group debuted its Kentucky Teacher Fellowship in the state with joint support from the Kentucky Department of Education, the Kentucky Education Association, the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce, and the Prichard Committee, a leading Kentucky education-advocacy organization. The fellowship debuted in June 2013 with nearly 20 fellows representing various geographic locations and regions throughout the state. The Hope Street Group has also engaged in conversations with several other states about eventual partnerships.

As for the teacher-voice movement, Uptain stresses that it cannot simply be a passing fad.

We're transforming the profession as a whole, so that teachers feel more valued. ... The idea is building in leadership opportunities for teachers so that they can both stay in the classroom and pursue leadership. I think with that, it's going to attract more people to the profession, but then also retain teachers who are currently in the profession who may be burning out, providing them different opportunities so that they stay.⁸⁰

U.S. Department of Education: Teaching Ambassador Fellowship⁸¹

Founded: Fall 2008

Director: Gillian Cohen-Boyer

Membership (number of fellows, past and present): 80 total—12 fellows in 2012–2013 class representing seven states and the District of Columbia)

Mission: The Department of Education believes that teachers should have meaningful opportunities to contribute to and understand the policies that impact their students and school communities

What makes it unique: Washington, D.C., fellows take a leave from their classrooms to work directly in the Department of Education

offices for one academic year. Classroom fellows work part time—between 20 and 40 hours a month—while teaching. All fellows are expected to inform the Department of Education about its programs and policies based on their on-the-ground experience

Issue areas: Federal-policy initiatives; fellows have lead input on the RESPECT project, Race to the Top, School Improvement Grants, and early learning and high-school redesign

Funding: Government program

Locations: See membership above

Source: Author's interviews and independent research.

A fellowship housed at the U.S. Department of Education hardly seems to fit in among a group of grassroots organizations, but it came into being because an individual teacher pointed out the need to bridge the gap between what professionals do in classrooms and what policymakers do in Washington. In 2007 Jocelyn Pickford, a teacher in Fairfax, Virginia, wrote her White House Fellows application about this issue, and during her tenure, shared the idea with then-Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings. Spellings agreed and invited Pickford to help run the pilot for the Department of Education, which was dubbed the Teaching Ambassador Fellowship, or TAF. There were 25 fellows in the first class, the 2008-09 school year.⁸²

TAF hosts two sets of fellows: Washington Fellows, who take one year off from teaching and work directly in the Department of Education, and Classroom Fellows, who work on projects while continuing to teach in their respective states and districts. The Department of Education calls on each set of fellows to illuminate the tangible qualities of federal policy and how the on-the-ground implementation of those policies is playing out throughout the nation. “We have a lot of people at the U.S. Department of Education who have taught, but you very quickly lose that reality,” says Gillian Cohen-Boyer, director of TAF. “The Washington Fellows can offer a current classroom perspective, and even more so, the Classroom Fellows, because they are still doing it every day and can therefore tell us what happened yesterday and what’s going to happen tomorrow.”

By allowing teachers direct input into the Department of Education’s pursuits, the fellowship creates a better feedback loop between leaders creating federal-education policy and classroom teachers—the main purpose of TAF, according to Cohen-Boyer. “We tell the fellows that their role is to learn as much as they can, share that information with other educators, and bring us back what they think about those things based on what they experience and what they’re hearing from other people,” Cohen-Boyer says.

Fellows have the opportunity to comment on and shape federal policies as they are conceived, formulated, and/or implemented. Fellows are also able to build a network of teacher leaders who have had the chance to do the same. The Department of Education hosts three in-person meetings for the Washington Fellows and Classroom Fellows, and keeps in touch through technology-based outlets such as email and social media groups, including an internal Facebook page. Cohen-Boyer explains that the Washington Fellows, while embedded in the Department of Education working with senior staff on specific policy initiatives or programs, also spend about 50 percent of their time on outreach by taking part in

various activities from attending policy events to hosting roundtables with other educators to writing for the Department of Education’s blog, “Homeroom.”⁸³ Because the fellows are still teaching, Classroom Fellows do most of their learning remotely and contribute on an as-can-do basis, Cohen-Boyer explains. Washington Fellows and Classroom Fellows alike often have to speak on behalf of the Department of Education, but Cohen-Boyer insists that total agreement with the department’s policies is not a prerequisite for acceptance into the fellowship. According to Cohen-Boyer: “We choose people who are willing to learn and people who demonstrate diplomacy. ... There is not one teacher voice. There are teacher voices. And it’s our job to represent all of those.”

Each class of Teaching Ambassador Fellows has been different in size and distribution between Washington Fellows and Classroom Fellows. The first year was the largest class, but admittedly too large to adequately manage, Cohen-Boyer explains. Since then, the class size of fellows has decreased. This year, there are five Washington Fellows, six Classroom Fellows representing six different states, and for the first time, one regional fellow working full time out of the Department of Education’s Seattle office. The regional fellow supports the West Coast Classroom Fellows and provides a bridge between the Classroom and Washington Fellows. Although the fellowship class sizes have decreased, there has been no shortage of interest. This year, more than 1,200 people applied for up to 12 advertised spots.⁸⁴

Cohen-Boyer is excited about the work of the various teacher-voice organizations and unions in bringing more and varied teachers’ voices to the discussion. “I’m agnostic about the content or the philosophy of each of the organizations,” she says. “For me, the whole point of this program was to make sure that teachers were more involved in the policy discussions at the federal level that impact their classrooms, and the fact that that’s happening through all these different vehicles is terrific to see.” Moving forward, Cohen-Boyer sees the work of the various teacher-voice organizations fitting neatly into all of the initiatives of the Department of Education that impact teaching and leadership in schools, especially the department’s initiative to transform teaching, the RESPECT project (Recognizing Educational Success, Professional Excellence, and Collaborative Teaching).⁸⁵

While it doesn’t fall under the category of a new teacher-voice initiative, the Albert Einstein Distinguished Educator Fellowship Program is worth noting in this discussion. Created through congressional action, the fellowship seeks to increase teacher input on policy focused on the teaching of science, technology, engineering, and math, or STEM.

The Albert Einstein Distinguished Educator Fellowship Program⁸⁶

Founded: 1994

Program director: Anthonette Peña

Membership (number of fellows, past and present): 236

Mission: Fellowships increase understanding, communication, and cooperation between the legislative and executive branches of government and the STEM education community

What makes it unique: The fellowship was established through the Albert Einstein Distinguished Educator Fellowship Act of 1994

Issue areas: Science, technology, engineering, and math, or STEM

Funding: Government program

Although it is neither a new fellowship nor is it grassroots, the Albert Einstein Distinguished Educator Fellowship Program was established to allow teachers to have an impact on policy, particularly in the STEM fields. Created in 1994 through an act of Congress, the Albert Einstein Distinguished Educator Fellowship Program is dedicated to raising awareness about STEM education and bridging the gap between STEM federal-policy initiatives and the STEM education community. The congressional act solidified and expanded an already-existing fellowship, the Albert Einstein Congressional Fellowship Program, which had been in existence since 1990 through a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation with partial matching money from other sources. Run through the Triangle Coalition for Science and Technology Education, the fellowship began when leaders of the Triangle Coalition realized that Congress was passing laws that committed billions of dollars to programs aimed at educators without receiving any direct input from the classroom educators. Beginning with just four

fellows, the Einstein Fellowship Program has grown to as many as 30 fellows per cohort, with a total of 236 STEM educators participating over the past 19 years.⁸⁷

Einstein fellows take a leave of absence from the classroom for one year to come to Washington, D.C., and work in congressional offices, the Department of Energy, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the National Science Foundation, or another federal agency. The fellowship, which is administered by the Triangle Coalition for Science and Technology Education for the Department of Energy, in partnership with other participating federal agencies, offers selected fellows a one-week orientation on the federal policymaking environment and coordinates once-a-month professional-development opportunities where fellows gather to gain deeper understanding and knowledge of STEM education. Past professional-development opportunities have included visits to the Central Intelligence Agency, the Library of Congress, and the National Academy of Sciences, according to Anthonette Peña, program director of the Albert Einstein Distinguished Educator Fellowship Program and former Einstein fellow.⁸⁸

Peña says leaders at the federal agencies that accept Einstein Fellows find STEM-teacher input valuable to their work and decision making. The Einstein Fellows find that gaining a deeper understanding of the policies that impact their profession helps to inform their teaching practice. According to Peña:

I think the fellowship program provides an opportunity for teachers who are like-minded to get together and really get into deep discussions about the things they are passionate about and provide insight. The one thing that we hear over and over again from the fellows is that the teachers feel valued in being able to provide their insight and feedback into federally funded programs. When there is teacher input, there is better buy-in at the classroom level.⁸⁹

Teacher-voice movement?

If movements are defined by the number of people involved in them, then the various teacher-voice organizations and fellowships mentioned in this paper do not constitute a teacher-voice movement. While thousands of teachers around the nation are taking part in them, they represent a small percentage of the overall population of practicing teachers. But perhaps these teachers are part of the beginning of something larger, something that other teachers are interested in being a part of.

“I operate under the belief that teachers have extraordinary talent, very smart ideas, are highly keyed into their local contexts, and want to make things better,” says Dan Brown, Department of Education Teaching Ambassador Fellow. According to Brown, as he and other fellows talk to teachers across the country about education policy, the talk in Washington doesn’t match up to the experience of most teachers. The daily experience of teachers in most schools is far removed from what Brown and other fellows find themselves working on in the department. “In far too many circumstances, they’re [teachers] just running on a hamster wheel trying to cover what they need to cover as opposed to making the system better,” he says.⁹⁰

Changing demographic trends in the teaching workforce might be leading the growth in teacher-voice groups and shift toward some kind of larger movement that could change the way educators organize themselves around policy issues. A recent study found that there are more first-year teachers in U.S. classrooms than teachers at any other experience level.⁹¹ Not only that, but as the teaching workforce is becoming less experienced overall, it’s simultaneously getting less stable: From 1998 to 2008 the annual attrition from the teaching workforce rose by 41 percent.⁹² These trends beg the question: What can be done to keep teachers in the classroom?

According to Celine Coggins, founder of Teacher Plus:

It’s really important that as we go through this transition, we find ways to understand the interests and needs of the folks who will be the future of the profession.

*We need to think in the context of how to make teaching more dynamic and allow teachers to expand their impact. I think having a voice in policy is an important piece of that.*⁹³

Teacher-voice organizations are working to provide opportunities for teachers to reimagine the teaching profession and invest them in shaping a profession that they want to grow in. For Lauren McAlee, a Hope Street Group Fellow, it has meant thinking about how to create a position in teaching that she envisions for herself in the future. “This experience has made me want, even more than I did, to work in a hybrid leadership role in which I’m active in a classroom, but also have significant time and energy to dedicate to district, state, and national reform,” she says. “Seeing how my experience in a classroom makes me a better advocate in this fellowship has made me really hope for that type of hybrid leadership role.”⁹⁴

This is not to suggest that all teachers feel similarly to McAlee. The teacher-voice organizations operate under the premise that teacher voice is not monolithic; that there is not one teacher voice, but rather many teacher voices. Brown, a Department of Education Fellow, does not think it’s fair to suggest that teacher voice can be divided by teacher age or experience level. “I’m not totally comfortable saying it’s an age thing,” Brown says. “Yeah, there is plenty of old driftwood, and there are also plenty of clueless young teachers.”⁹⁵ Yet, as Koppich, an education-policy analyst, writes, the time period in which teachers stepped into the system likely has some effect on the things they value about being a teacher. According to Koppich:

*Teachers hired at the height of the civil rights movement and shortly thereafter are truly a different generation. ... They value job security and autonomy, are wary of competition, and oppose differential treatment. Newer teachers, by contrast, bring to their jobs a penchant for variety, teamwork, risk taking and entrepreneurial opportunities.*⁹⁶

Nonetheless, for teacher voice to be considered a movement, more teachers need to be afforded greater opportunities to get involved. Teachers unions have taken notice of these groups and have seen an opportunity to collaborate. According to NEA’s Raabe, “I think that these organizations are filling a niche that in some ways we failed to fill for a period of time.” In order to learn from teacher-voice organizations’ members and provide them with a larger platform to express their opinions, the NEA has partnered with Teach Plus and VIVA on several different projects.

According to Raabe:

I think these groups do great work, but they don't have the capacity to move beyond. One of the reasons we want to partner with them is that we think they have some really great assets that can really help us. We also think we have some great assets that can help them by raising the voice of teachers and raising the profile of teachers.⁹⁷

The American Federation of Teachers does not currently have plans to partner with teacher-voice organizations, preferring instead to focus on engaging teachers through their own social-media platform and ongoing strategies. According to Rob Weil, the ATF's director of field programs and educational issues:

The AFT doesn't have an official position on these groups because we believe people must have the right to be a part of any organization they want to be part of. We have to worry about whether we're doing a good job, whether we are effectively engaging and representing our members well and not worry about what other people are doing. That's kind of how we look at it.⁹⁸

While teacher-voice organizations and unions may be viewed as separate entities, William Wong with the teacher-voice organization, Educators 4 Excellence, sees each working in tandem toward the same end. "I believe everyone has the same goal of improved student learning and elevating the teaching profession," Wong says. "I think unions and some of these teacher groups are trying to do that, although they may emphasize different approaches on how to best reach these goals."⁹⁹

Whether the new teacher-voice groups constitute a full-fledged movement or are just another chapter in the long history of the teaching profession doesn't change the fact that these groups have caught the attention of policymakers, union leaders, and educators at all levels. Teach Plus, for example, was successful at convincing decision makers who otherwise were in a stalemate. Its fellows reached out to Jean-Claude Brizard, then-CEO of Chicago Public Schools, and to Chicago Teachers Union President Karen Lewis, and were successful in getting Brizard and Lewis together on stage for the only time last summer before the infamous Chicago teachers strike.¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

The ideas that the teacher-voice groups use as their organizing principles and goals of these fellowships resonate with those teachers already involved, and according to the leaders of these groups, have garnered interest beyond the initial membership. Teach Plus has had close to 2,700 teachers attend events on the Common Core State Standards Initiative and another 400 teachers attend webinars on the same topic.¹⁰¹ All of the fellowship opportunities receive hundreds more applicants than they can accept.

This evolution of teacher-voice activity is occurring at a time when important shifts in the management of human capital in schools is taking place, and when policies to identify educators based on their effectiveness in the classroom have taken hold. While some see these changes as being potentially harmful to educators, others see them as liberating for teachers and teaching. And in some instances, teachers have found teacher-voice organizations as a safe place for them to learn and affect change in their profession.

According to Vailala Salazar, a member of Educators 4 Excellence in New York City:

I think that, in general, a lot of people are interested in policies that affect teachers. E4E is a good network for people who do the same thing that we do—they have our best interest in mind. It's a network that teachers trust and the social aspect is strong as well. They want us to understand the issue and have more of a voice in what is going on and that's what we want too.¹⁰²

In the past half-decade, teacher-voice organizations have found themselves in a sweet situation with the possibility of a movement coming together at a time of a near-perfect combination of events. Federal policies have forced an unprecedented collaboration between policymakers and teachers. Long-term teachers who may have been weary of enduring a new suite of policy ideas are retiring or have already exited the profession.¹⁰³ New teachers, because they are now less likely to teach in the same school and in the same grade for a decade, and are hungry for leadership

opportunities. Teachers say they want their voices heard, especially with regard to the policies that are directly aimed at their day-to-day practice.

As federal grant program money runs out, it's hard to say if the policies these programs have created will continue to thrive. If so, it is likely that teacher voice will continue to be a major component in policies moving forward. This could be the beginning of a movement, but as Dan Brown explains, the road ahead won't be easy. What's more, it's an incredibly long way from a federal policy idea to school leaders, to teachers, and finally to students, which is where it was designed to have an effect. According to Brown:

I think for school-based reforms to succeed, school-based personnel need to be leading the way. Fellowships are rare; they are special opportunities, but there is so much potential for teachers to do a lot more leading than they're currently doing at the school and district level. It's an exciting time because the need is so great, but it's also becoming clear to me why so many smart people have been working on this for so long and we're still really frustrated. It's an immensely complicated country with extraordinary diversity.¹⁰⁴

About the author

Kaitlin Pennington is a Policy Analyst on the Education Policy team at the Center for American Progress, where she focuses on human-capital policies, particularly around building capacity in the teaching profession and teacher and principal effectiveness. Prior to the Center, she worked as a policy analyst at the education policy nonprofit Colorado Succeeds. Previously, Kaitlin worked in the Office of Colorado Sen. Mike Johnston (D) as an Urban Leaders Policy Fellow and in the Office of School Reform and Innovation at Denver Public Schools. As a Teach For America corps member, she taught middle school English and language arts in Washington, D.C. Kaitlin holds a master's degree in education from George Mason University and a bachelor's degree in journalism and political science from Syracuse University.

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Appendix

The interviews that were part of the research for this paper were conducted from December 2012 through April 2013 and include the following:

- **Jo Anderson**, senior advisor to Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, U.S. Department of Education
- **Antholette Peña**, program director, the Triangle Coalition for Science and Technology Education
- **Katherine Bassett**, executive director, National Network of State Teachers of the Year
- **Bill Raabe**, director, Center for Great Public Schools, National Education Association
- **Dan Brown**, teaching ambassador fellow, U.S. Department of Education
- **Vailala Salazar**, New York City member, Educators 4 Excellence
- **Sibyll Carnochan Catalan**, executive director, Fellowship for Teachers and Principals, America Achieves
- **Evan Stone**, co-founder and co-chief executive officer, Educators 4 Excellence
- **Gillian Cohen-Boyer**, director, Teaching Ambassador Fellowship, U.S. Department of Education
- **Wendy Uptain**, deputy director of teacher engagement, Hope Street Group
- **Celine Coggins**, chief executive officer and founder, Teach Plus
- **Adam Urbanski**, president, Rochester Teachers Association, founder, TURN
- **Alesha Daughtrey**, director of partnerships and professional learning, Center for Teaching Quality
- **Rob Weil**, director of field programs and educational issues, the American Federation of Teachers
- **Elizabeth Evans**, founding chief executive officer, VIVA Teachers
- **William Wong**, Los Angeles member, Educators 4 Excellence
- **Lauren McAlee**, national teacher fellow, Hope Street Group

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