



THE ARIZONA TEACHER PARTNERSHIP

Arizona, like many states across the country, is facing a severe teacher shortage. According to the 2015 Arizona Department of Education report, 24 percent of Arizona teachers leave after their first year and 20 percent leave after their second year. Arizona universities continually report decreasing numbers of students declaring and graduating with education degrees. As of 2016, only 21 percent of Arizona educators were over 55-years-old and approaching retirement. Arizona needs to recruit excellent, qualified teachers and we need those teachers to remain in the profession.

One of the many problems that has created high teacher turnover is the need to continually train and equip new teaching professionals with the skills, knowledge, and pedagogy that will adequately address the rigor and instructional shifts mandated by Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards.

In 2014, we created The Arizona Teacher Partnership in an attempt to retain the talented teaching force in our state. Our goal for the partnership was providing support to new teachers by pairing them with teachers from around the state that had been recognized through the Arizona Teacher of the Year Program. To get the most out of the partnership, we attempted to match novice teachers with mentor teachers in the same grade level/content area as a resource to guide, motivate, and lead their new-teacher partners. Our vision was to provide new teachers with an objective, nonjudgmental partner who would support them by collaborating on pedagogy and providing emotional support and advice.

Throughout the first two years we gathered anecdotal and quantitative participation data to help us make decisions on the best steps forward to meet our initial goals.



In the beginning of the program, we focused on working with first-year teachers but we soon realized that is an extremely busy and demanding year. We then changed our focus to working with teachers who had completed at least one year in the classroom. We also struggled to determine the best method of pairing new teachers with mentor teachers. Should we match them based on geography or content area/grade level? Feedback from new teachers revealed that content area/grade level matches were more meaningful. To help connect teachers who were located on opposite sides of Arizona, we leveraged video technology to foster personal and meaningful mentor relationships.

Today the Arizona Teacher Partnership has mentor teachers engaging with cohorts of new teachers, versus one-on-one interactions (although that is certainly allowable and occurs). It's a support system for all teachers involved as they collaborate and discuss ideas around carefully selected content. As the leaders of the program, we saw these cohorts as a way to build knowledge and pedagogical skills around the Arizona College and Career Ready Standards. We use webinars and articles from achievethecore.org to craft discussion questions and prompts for each cohort to consider as they collaborate virtually.

Each year since the launch, we've averaged six mentor teachers who each inspire and support five new teachers. The participating teachers span from kindergarten to 12th grade and include every subject area including core subjects, electives, and special education.

The monthly meetings focus on building pedagogical skills for teaching Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards. We leverage the resources from Student Achievement Partners, a free online set of lesson plans, videos, and trainings. We follow a flipped classroom model. Teachers independently view online training videos or read articles and then meet as a collaborative group to discuss their learnings and work



through struggles. We have led webinars on closing the achievement gap, shifting the work from the teacher to the student, and using district and online curriculum effectively. Teachers have access to research-based resources such as text sets, vocabulary word finders, coherence maps, Basal alignment models, and online math worksheets, activities, and games.

Participating teachers report, that through our programming, they are able to make immediate changes to their classroom instruction. Deidre Cantrell in the Dysart School District states that she has her students expanding their vocabulary “by reading challenging stories and reading aloud.” She continues, “Most students are behind with vocabulary and need to learn with rapid speed to get them caught up.”

Monique Parks, who works, in the Dysart School District shifted her teaching from teacher-centered to student-centered by asking purposeful questions. She shared, “I liked the idea of not being a ‘parrot’. I often do this, and I shouldn’t. I should keep the students accountable for listening to each other. I am going to start asking questions such as ‘what do you think?’” She reports that her students are doing more active work in class as she holds them responsible for learning and listening.

Breanna Madison, also a participating teacher from the Avondale School District, changed her classroom set up so students could have more peer conversations. She explained that her biggest challenge was “getting the students familiar with addressing each other.” To help her students move from a teacher-centric classroom to a student-centric classroom, she changed how her students’ desks were arranged and rethought how they were grouped together. “I needed to set rules and routines about who is talking and making sure everyone has the chance to think about the question/problem and talk about the question/problem.” Now that Breanna has been in the classroom for a year and has received our extra professional development, she says she’s realizing the traditional classroom setup doesn’t serve her students’ needs.



Students in Ms. Madison's, Ms. Parks', and Ms. Cantrell's classrooms are lucky to have teachers that are reflective and are open to improving their practice through opportunities like the Arizona Teacher Partnership that didn't exist before.

New Arizona teachers are receiving more support and actively learning how to utilize resources as a result of our program. We believe that by keeping new teachers in the classroom we can provide experienced and well-equipped teachers for Arizona students.

Ultimately, our goal is to increase the supports teachers are receiving so they so that they will be more likely to choose to remain in the classroom, with the hope that today's new teachers become tomorrow's mentor teachers.

While many school districts provide new teacher mentoring and induction programs, attrition data suggests that these programs are not enough to provide teachers with the skills, knowledge, and supports necessary to give them a strong sense of self-efficacy in their classrooms. The Arizona Teacher Partnership has harnessed traditional mentoring and induction to better support new teachers and raise the bar.

What would it look like if new teachers are given the opportunity to lead? To expand their content and instructional knowledge beyond their day-to-day curriculum? To collaborate with teachers from around their state? If we want to keep the teachers we have, and grow them into the teacher leaders of tomorrow, we need to make such investments. It's not only for their benefit, but for the hundreds of students who will benefit from our efforts.