

THE CASE FOR BELIEF

the
TEACHERS GUILD × SCHOOL
RETCOL

5 Years of School Engagement,
5 Building Blocks for Equitable School Change



TO OUR COMMUNITY,

Along with educators, families, and communities around the country, we've been asking ourselves, "Where do we go from here?"

From the COVID-19 pandemic to the reawakening of racial injustice in the U.S., the last few months have highlighted the uncertainty and deep inequities of our communities and schools. Fundamental questions about how we teach and learn can no longer be considered slowly; the urgency to evolve is upon us. The education system has long been ripe for radical and imaginative redesign, and nobody knows this more than educators, families, and students.

When schools come together to engage in the challenging, but essential work of designing together, amazing things are possible. Schools can co-design the types of changes they dream for students by leveraging expertise from within, among the families, teachers, and school leaders in their communities.

Co-design requires building a team and pursuing collective aspirations together. It's people, not policies, who will create the equitable, lasting change that our schools desperately need. What The Teachers Guild x School Retool has observed over the past five years is more relevant today than ever: **co-designing better schools starts with believing in each other.** A collective belief that you can positively impact students is the foundation for creating more equitable schools. And so, with this report, **we are making the case for belief.** The case for taking risks and trying new things. The case for radically prioritizing student needs.

How might we translate feeling into collective action? Where do we go from here? We go forward. Together.



Molly McMahon
Director, The Teachers Guild x
School Retool



JOURNEY OF CHANGE

Over the past five years, through The Teachers Guild and School Retool, our communities have been building belief and change in their classrooms and schools.

Alongside educators and collaborators, our programs worked to create equitable change in nearly 900 schools across the United States.

We've reminded teachers that they're innovators and leaders. We've helped principals adopt hacking mindsets and think outside the four walls of the office. And we've engaged students as problem solvers, not problem makers.

Along the way, we've found that no one practice or methodology takes root on its own. Instead, the greatest results come from having the right foundation. This is especially true in times when schools face complex challenges and uncertainty. We have strived to help create the necessary conditions for all educators and students, especially those furthest from opportunity, to thrive.

Our program practices are not revolutionary. Its core tenets: design thinking¹, deeper learning², culturally responsive teaching³, collective efficacy⁴, learning science⁵, and relational trust⁶, are well-established and documented. All of them urge us to take into account the full human experience of a system. All suggest that our willingness to consider our own feelings and experiences, along with the feelings and experiences of others, is at the core of any human-centered effort to create change.

¹ IDEO, 2013

² Van der Ark and Schneider, 2014

³ Ladson-Billings, 1994

⁴ Donohoo et al., 2018

⁵ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, & Medicine, 2018

⁶ Bryk and Schneider, 2002

Yet, we are making a bold case. We are a systems change organization, but our essential lever is people, not policies. To equitably change these systems, you start with people.

We propose that building belief among the adults and young people in school communities is the single most important factor to catalyzing change at the most basic human level.

That is, above other strategies, schools that are interested in creating equitable change should focus on fostering belief in the individuals and groups that make up their communities, and creating ways for them to act upon that belief.

To reimagine schools as communities built on racial justice, academic excellence, and humble interdependence requires that we reimagine how people see and act towards one another.





The Case for Belief is the case for translating feeling into action.

It's the case for becoming vulnerable, and going outside our comfort zones to understand student and parent needs. It's the case for taking risks, trying new things, and assessing if they work or not. It's educators and families evolving and collaborating with each other. It's schools radically prioritizing student needs. It's tapping into the reasons why educators joined the profession in the first place.

The Case for Belief is the case for caring and taking action. And that is where change begins.

DEFINING BELIEF AND ITS BUILDING BLOCKS

When we say “belief,” we mean trusting in and taking action towards our collective potential. We’re not talking about false hope or blind faith. It’s having confidence in one’s ability to grow and change. It’s people, not policies, catalyzing change at the most basic human level.

Based on five years of collaboration and experimentation, and a robust research base, we’re excited to share five essential building blocks for developing belief in schools to create equitable change.

In what follows, we’ll present emotional stories and empirical evidence, alongside some resources to support you in boosting these components in your own community.

Trust: Relationships drive transformation

Belonging: Equity begins with each person being valued

Resilience: Big change starts small

Evidence: Proof leads to progress

Collaboration: One plus one equals three

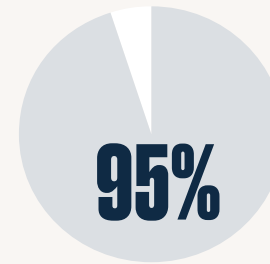
We know that no single person, policy, or practice leads to equitable school change. But, when combined, these building blocks can create a powerful sense of belief and set a strong foundation for school change.



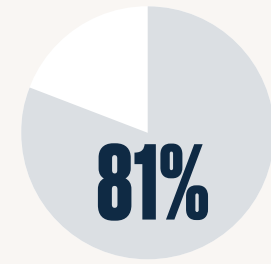
WHEN BELIEF COMES FIRST

Successful efforts to build belief pay off in remarkable ways for school communities. All students benefit from higher quality and more equitable learning opportunities, enabling them to thrive. Educators are able to more quickly shift their practices to adapt to the complex and ever-changing needs of 21st century learners. Educators also grow in their sense of personal and collective efficacy, leading to increased satisfaction and retention, which has a significant and positive impact on school communities.

Over the past five years, we have supported educators to develop the building blocks of belief. Our survey results reflect promising results among our participants:



believe in their ability to
positively affect students



said the program inspired
them to remain in education

SUBSTANTIAL GROWTH⁷

in participants' sense of collective efficacy⁸

⁷ Effect size = .92, as gauged by a pre-/post-assessment using the Collective Efficacy in Instructional Strategies subscale of Tschannen-Moran and Barr's (2004) Collective Teacher Beliefs Scale

⁸ Tschannen-Moran and Barr (2004) define collective efficacy as the "collective self-perception that teachers in a given school make an educational difference to their students over and above the educational impact of their homes and communities"

How might you cultivate the building blocks of belief—trust, belonging, resilience, evidence, and collaboration—in your school to deepen the impact do you want to make?

What resources will you need to get there? Across our community, educators are tackling these very questions. We invite you to draw inspiration from their journeys as you consider how to catalyze belief in your own school community. We hope you'll make these building blocks of belief your own.



BUILDING BLOCKS OF BELIEF



Building Block #1

TRUST

**RELATIONSHIPS
DRIVE TRANSFORMATION**

BUILDING BELIEF THROUGH TRUST

Students, teachers, parents, and community members work together everyday. When those relationships are grounded in trust, they have the power to transform the learning experience. Building trusting relationships is difficult work. It takes time, self-examination, and healthy doses of humility and dedication.

But the effort pays off. According to a landmark study⁹ by Anthony Bryk and Barbara Schneider, relational trust among adults is essential for effective school improvement. School communities with high relational trust are home to, among other things, more experimentation, better decision-making, and improved student learning.

⁹ Bryk and Schneider, 2002

**“In organizations,
real power and energy
is generated through
relationships, and
the capacity to form those
relationships is more
important than
tasks, functions, roles,
and positions.”**

Margaret Wheatley
Author and consultant on organizational behavior



**100+**

educators involved

6

schools reached

20+

innovations designed

LEADING FROM TOP-DOWN AND BOTTOM-UP

How a district administrator leveraged trust to begin scaling a change initiative across the district

As the 14th largest school district in the U.S., Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS) thrives on efficient, well-delineated systems and protocols for scaling change. Babak Mostaghimi, the Executive Director of Innovation and Program Improvement for GCPS, knew this well. But charged with improving learning communities at a faster pace than other district initiatives, Babak knew he'd have to depart from the normal protocol, which would require trust, flexibility, and a team well-equipped with both. He looked no further than the district's innovation engines: teachers.

High school teachers Amy Easley, Richelle Kirkland, and Amy Wildey were among the first leaders of the GCPS design thinking initiative. As experienced educators with

decades of classroom teaching among them, they wondered where and how they might find new leadership opportunities in the district. None had worked closely with each other before, but they knew they could make a stronger case for redesigning classrooms and schools in a large, process-driven district if they stuck together. Doing so allowed them to distribute the risk, aggregate their learnings, and share leadership to build a sustainable initiative.

Over the course of two years, the trusting partnership between Babak, Amy, Richelle, and Amy led to the development of more than 20 innovations designed by nearly 100 educators across six schools in GCPS. Some of the ideas — such as a student-led course in scheduling and a series of career exploration pathways — were so well-received by students and educators that they scaled far beyond individual classrooms. The team is riding the momentum and are now broadening professional learning based in design thinking across the district.

The unique district-school partnership among Babak, Amy, Richelle, and Amy has proven to educators at all levels in GCPS that school change doesn't have to be top-down or bottom-up alone. It's about getting the right people in the room and building trusting relationships. Give them a chance to share their hopes and concerns, have constructive arguments, and connect with others around a shared purpose. Only then will colleagues choose to engage in the humbling and rigorous work required to create systems that support all students — regardless of their backgrounds or circumstances — to thrive.

“At first, people weren’t willing to take risks. But during the program, they really connected with each other, which made them feel more confident to step out of their comfort zones for the sake of their students.”

Babak Mostaghimi
Executive Director of Innovation and Program Improvement,
Gwinnett County Public Schools
Suwanee, Georgia



TRUST ACROSS OUR PROGRAM

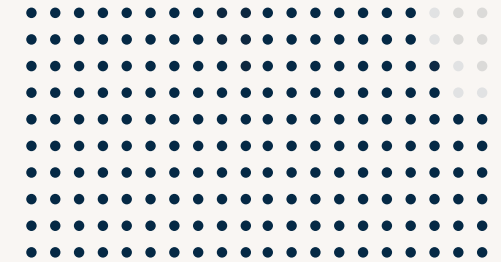
In both The Teachers Guild and School Retool communities, teachers, school principals, and district administrators are building trusting relationships across the hallways — bridging positions, experience, differences, and departments — for the benefit of their students. Among participants over the past five years, we've observed that:

91%

believe that the program connected them with people whom they may not normally work with

85%

note that their colleagues offer support when they ask for help



MORE THAN 95%

of the 200 solutions designed last year were created by diverse, cross-departmental teams of educators with varying levels of experience

What we have seen also aligns to what Bryk and Schneider¹⁰ and others¹¹ have noted: that consistent, trustworthy collaboration among diverse groups of colleagues fuels innovation. It also helps retain educators and boost their satisfaction, both key to leading sustainable change efforts in schools.¹²

¹⁰ Bryk and Schneider, 2002

¹¹ Daly et al., 2014

¹² Natale et al., 2016

TRUST IN ACTION

Put trust into action in your own school community.

| | | | |
|--|---|---|--|
|  | Use your heart, and look for the social and emotional factors at play: |  | Use your head, and push your own thinking and understanding: |
| <p>As you build trusting relationships in your school community, consider the experience of the district-school team from Gwinnett County. Here are some key components that contributed to their success:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1 Administrators have a unique opportunity to elevate and honor voices across their school communities — don't pass up the chance to support others in moments of success and vulnerability.2 Focus on informal, frequent interactions between colleagues, when they come together to express ideas, opinions, and expectations; trust-building is like a snowball gradually rolling down a hill, not an avalanche.3 When piloting a new or provocative initiative, build buy-in and lower risks by distributing leadership across a team of diverse people. | | <p>Questions to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">? Who in your school is trusted to lead change?? How do you build trusting relationships with your colleagues?? How might you redesign the way administrators and teachers collaborate in your school community? | |
| | |  | Use your hands, and put these methods into action in your classroom and school: |
| | | <p>Interested in building trusting, productive relationships with your colleagues? Try Teacher-to-Teacher Feedback, from our collection of Equitable Learning Practices.</p> | |

Building Block #2

BELONGING

**EQUITY BEGINS WITH
EACH PERSON BEING SEEN**

BUILDING BELIEF THROUGH BELONGING

An equitable school culture creates the conditions for every student and adult to achieve their potential. When successful, this has broad implications. As the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) suggests, “a fair and inclusive system that makes the advantages of education available to all is one of the most powerful levers to make society more equitable.”¹³

Not surprisingly, extensive equity standards, which exist for all certified professionals in schools at all levels,¹⁴ provide a stable foundation for building an equity agenda in school communities.

But, equity doesn’t begin or end on paper. It manifests in conversations, in nonverbal cues, in actions, in the things we say or don’t, in the people we choose to engage with or not. Ultimately, understanding what each individual needs starts with that person being deeply seen, known, and valued, and then applying that knowledge to help them thrive.

¹³ OECD, 2008

¹⁴ Beyerbach and Nassoiiy, 2004

**“To teach in a manner
that respects and cares for
the souls of our students is
essential if we are
to provide the necessary
conditions where learning
can most deeply and
intimately begin.”**

bell hooks
Author, professor, feminist, and social activist



**2**

Students inspired schoolwide mentoring program

76

Students attended information sessions

100+

Students signed up for peer mentoring

SPOTTING UNCOMMON LEADERS IN COMMON PLACES

How an unexpected exchange motivated an administrator to see potential in every student

Assistant Principal Ashley Smith's goals were clear. She wanted students and administrators to work together to make decisions; teachers to remain curious and ask questions of their students; and students to support each other.

Ashley seized an opportunity to get started after parking her desk in the hallway, allowing her to better observe students outside of class.¹⁵ There, she noticed two boys talking. The older student was encouraging a younger student who Ashley

had struggled to reach to get to class — and the younger boy listened!

Seeing how seriously the boy took advice from the older student helped Ashley see that, in his eyes, this was a respected mentor.

¹⁵ Bryk and Schneider, 2002

Encouraged, she dug into peer mentoring more intentionally. She set up a few pairs of students in older-to-younger mentor pairs and immediately saw an impact on their engagement. When more students asked to take on the responsibility of being mentors, she held an information session, where 76 students expressed interest in participating.

But teachers were not sold on the program. “Should ‘those kids’ be allowed to mentor?” they asked. But Ashley persevered, designing activities and supports to help over 100 students become even better mentors. The school’s principal was thrilled by the program’s success, saying, “Why did we wait to tap into the power of our students?”

Moving forward, Ashley and her colleagues are working to make North Kansas City High School a place where students develop more agency so they can both experience healing and improved academic performance.

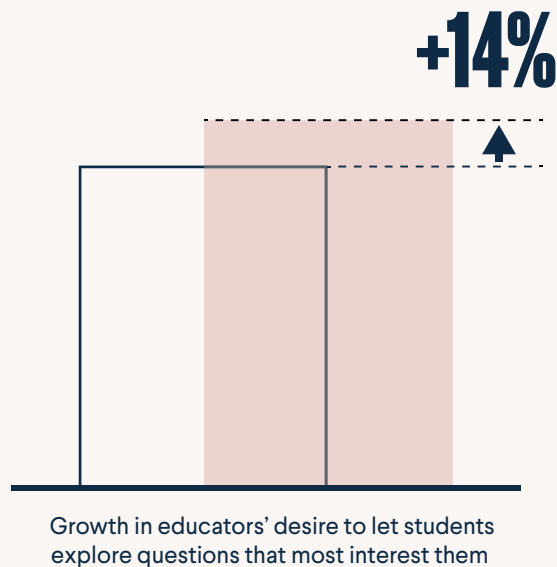
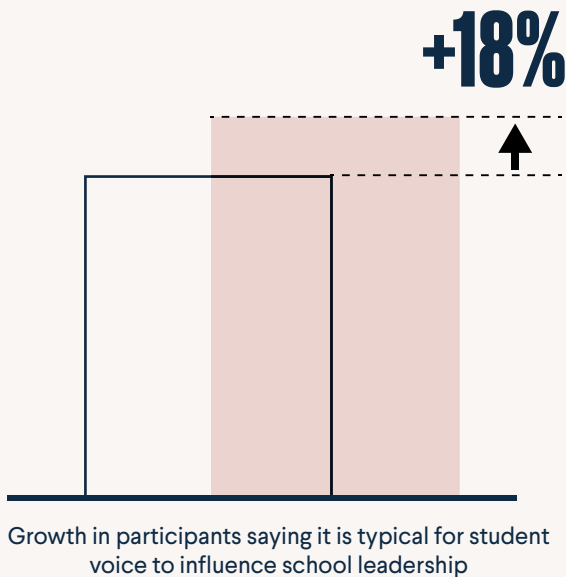
“What if historically marginalized students could equitably share power as ‘uncommon leaders’ and experience school as a place where their learning needs were valued?”

Ashley Smith
Assistant Principal, North Kansas City High School
Kansas City, Missouri



IMPACT ACROSS OUR COMMUNITY







School leaders and teachers are combining empathy and equity to build school cultures that support meaningful learning for all students, especially those furthest from opportunity. As a result, over the past five years, we've observed:



When students are seen, heard, and valued, they know they belong, which boosts their motivation to engage in learning.

BELONGING IN ACTION

Put belonging into action in your own school community.

| | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
|  | Use your heart, and look for the social and emotional factors at play: |  | Use your head, and push your own thinking and understanding: |
| <p>As you think about continuing to boost belonging in your school community, consider Ashley’s experience designing a peer mentorship program. Here are some key components that contributed to her success:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1 Look beyond educator-centered spaces, like classrooms and offices; instead, observe how students behave with each other in hallways, the cafeteria, or outside of school.2 Seek out student needs where they’re least expected; we often make broad assumptions about where and when needs will surface.3 Student belonging starts with peer relationships, so create structures to help nourish them wherever possible, both in-person and online. | | <p>Questions to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are some key parts of your identity, and how do they advantage or disadvantage you in your school community? How do you define acceptable student behavior? What experiences and assumptions have informed that definition? Who benefits most from the improvement efforts that take place in your school community? | |
| | |  | Use your hands, and put these methods into action in your classroom and school: |
| | | <p>Interested in helping your school community increase belonging for all students? Try Restorative Justice Practices, from our collection of Equitable Learning Practices.</p> | |

Building Block #3

RESILIENCE

BIG CHANGES STARTS SMALL

BUILDING BELIEF THROUGH RESILIENCE

Schools often set unrealistic goals for change, investing so heavily in initiatives that the stakes become too high to entertain failure.

Starting small relieves people of this burden. It gives educators the freedom to begin with existing resources, get comfortable with failure, and celebrate continuous learning, which promotes growth. “Many small ideas are the germs of bigger ideas,” note professors and creative consultants Alan Robinson and David Schroeder. And, while investing in one big idea may allow you to “realize all the consequences of that idea,” they write, it wouldn’t necessarily allow you to “come up with all the associated ideas that turned out to be even more valuable.”¹⁶

By starting with smaller ideas — called “hacks” — and getting wins early in the design process, you can create the momentum to keep going, inspire others, build investment in change efforts, and create outsized impact.¹⁷ Ultimately, that snowball effect builds a culture where folks are part of the change, rather than feeling that change is being forced on them.

¹⁶ Robinson and Schroeder, 2004

¹⁷ Sims, 2011

“Once a small win has been accomplished, forces are set in motion that favor another small win.”

Peter Sims
Entrepreneur, author, and social innovator



THE POWER OF LOVE LETTERS

How two administrators' small hacks had a big impact on teacher and student culture

Morgan Vien wondered, "What would it look like for my teachers and kids to come to school every day saying, 'I'm sustained, I'm thriving, I'm learning'?"

To find out, Morgan and her colleague Jeff Embleton, the leadership team at ASCEND K-8 in Oakland, CA, focused on their teachers. If they could start small and increase teachers' agency and self-awareness toward meeting their own goals, they thought, teachers would be able to build that in their students.

They started small with some hacks to shift the teacher culture. They asked teachers to write love letters to themselves to honor who they are and what they love to do.

Then, they created passion plans, listing what makes them thrive and learn, and finding ways to apply it in support of a community dedicated to equity-centered student learning.

Teachers brought their passion plans to students. During an intersession week, teachers engaged students in hands-on, out-of-school, multi-age learning experiences, like rock climbing, urban exploration, and game design. This gave students opportunities to gain confidence in real skills with teachers who were working together at the top of their game.



486

Students involved

91%

Students received free or reduced priced lunch

18

Teacher passion plans shared with students

ASCEND was seeing improvements in school culture, better student experience, academic gains, parent satisfaction, and teacher retention. Teachers, seeing the value in starting small, began hacking independently, rather than asking permission.

Did they experience resistance? Does it take continued effort? Of course. But the ASCEND team is turning small steps into a growing sense of collective efficacy among teachers and school leaders to bring meaningful learning experiences to their students, and continuing to hack and learn along the way.

“It’s a try, and we’re going to learn from that, and we’re going to try again. Because these small hacks create huge change when you add it all up, and that’s been instrumental in our community.”

Morgan Vien
Former Principal, ASCEND K-8
Oakland, California



IMPACT ACROSS OUR COMMUNITY

The hack mindset is transforming how work gets done in schools. This means that educators and their teams are starting small, taking a bias to action, and being willing to fail forward and learn. Among participants, we've observed that:



84%

have scaled hacks into something bigger that affects student learning



92%

are regularly testing new ideas and strategies with their students






2,200+

hacks have been designed and implemented in schools

By starting small, educators in our community have become more resilient, yielding positive, observable results for them and their students.

RESILIENCE IN ACTION

Put resilience into action in your own school community.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|--|
|  | Use your heart, and look for the social and emotional factors at play: |  | Use your head, and push your own thinking and understanding: |
| <p>As you think about how to create big change by starting small, consider Morgan and Jeff’s experience starting with teacher</p> <div><div>1</div><div>Get vulnerable, but be joyful, too; resilience requires energy, so focus on topping up people’s emotional tanks early and often.</div></div> <div><div>2</div><div>Focus on building hack methods <i>and</i> mindsets because hacking is as much a philosophy as it is a process.</div></div> <div><div>3</div><div>Be willing to let go of your ideas — it will help you maintain an objective eye and take advantage of other ideas as they arise.</div></div> | | <p>Questions to consider:</p> <div><div>?</div><div>What could you do if you had to try it tomorrow with no additional resources?</div></div> <div><div>?</div><div>How does your school take on challenges as they arise?</div></div> <div><div>?</div><div>What trade-offs do you consider when taking risks for your students?</div></div> | |
| | |  | Use your hands, and put these methods into action in your classroom and school: |
| | | <p>Interested in hacking toward increased student learning in your school community? Try Students as Consultants, though starting small with any of the Equitable Learning Practices will work!</p> | |

Building Block #4

EVIDENCE

PROOF BUILDS PROGRESS

BUILDING BELIEF THROUGH EVIDENCE

One of the key components of collective efficacy is the belief that you and your colleagues can cause student learning. In practice, this translates to certain key educator behaviors, including believing in a collective capacity to create change, observing evidence of positive student impact, and holding equally high expectations for all students.¹⁸ Of the more than 250 factors that John Hattie analyzes in his Visible Learning research, collective efficacy is the factor most strongly associated with positive student outcomes.¹⁹

Our program offers many strategies to boost educators' collective efficacy, including boosting teachers' creative leadership, supporting teams to identify a common vision, and focusing on culture building. These types of activities have enormous benefits for educators, including increased satisfaction and retention. Creating ways for educators to understand their impact, and use that knowledge to grow their belief in themselves and each other, can motivate action and transform schools.

¹⁸ Bandura, 1993

¹⁹ Hattie, 2017

“Fundamentally, the most powerful way of thinking about a teacher’s role is for teachers to see themselves as evaluators of their effects on students.”

John Hattie
Professor of Education and Director,
Melbourne Education Research Institute, University of Melbourne, Australia



**560**

Students involved

10Teacher collaborators from the
same school**4**Unique measurement
tools used

THINKING BEYOND THE TEST

How two elementary school educators urged colleagues to reimagine what success looks like in classrooms

Mary Kohl, a second grade teacher in Perry, OH, wanted to increase her students' motivation to learn. They had expressed interest in dynamic, hands-on projects, so she took a human-centered design approach, creating and testing a host of options to gradually hone in on what works best for her students.

Throughout this process, Mary collaborated with her colleague, Sarah Loveland, to redesign classrooms to be more student-centered and integrated across the grade. Over many months, the colleagues worked together to regularly assess student behavior in response to the activities they designed. They gauged impact on student learning, engagement, and agency using four different measurement tools, from student

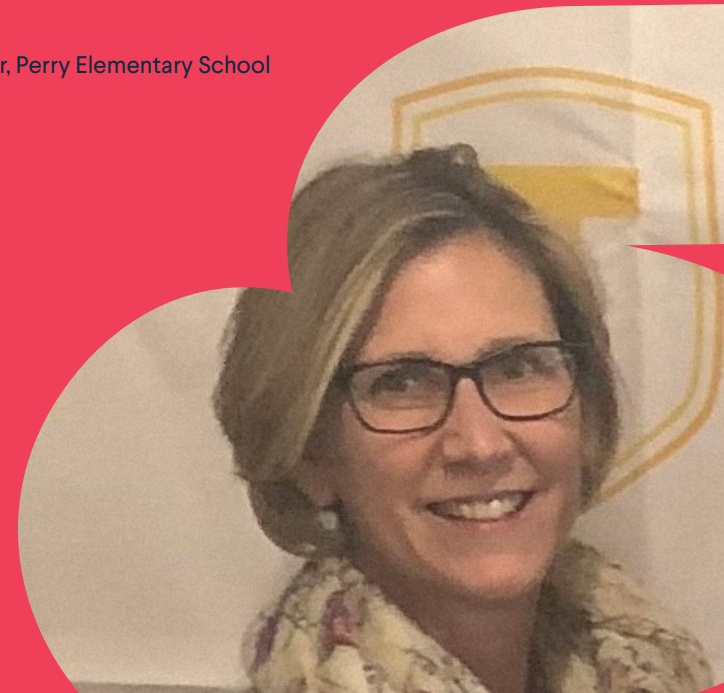
surveys to recording time on task. Their efforts to better understand the impact on students cultivated empathy and allowed them to grow closer to their students.

With over 30 years of teaching experience, Mary leveraged her expertise to support and challenge her colleagues to work in new ways, reviewing data, observing, and reflecting in order to understand the impact of their work, rather than just prescribing the curriculum for teachers and students. Not surprisingly, she has become widely regarded as a leader in her school community, and went on to guide a group of colleagues through an in-depth design process over the summer.

Mary and her 10 innovative colleagues comprised a group that spanned disciplines and grade levels, and which continues to design learning experiences that students deserve. Have they answered every question about how best to prepare students for an uncertain future? Certainly not. But, in Perry, there is a collective belief that they are asking the right questions and have the tools to increasingly understand their impact on students.

“School leaders trusted that the changes were informed by evidence and in the best interests of students, and gave us the room to try and fail and try again.”

Mary Kohl
2nd Grade Teacher, Perry Elementary School
Perry, Ohio



IMPACT ACROSS OUR COMMUNITY

SUBSTANTIAL GROWTH²⁰

In participants' collective efficacy — or the belief they can cause student learning — during the program.

Over the past five years, our participants have consistently demonstrated the clear connection between evidence-driven feedback and improvement. We've observed:

79%

of participants believe in their ability to implement alternative strategies and assessments in their schools.

With a heightened sense that they can positively impact students, educators in our community are more likely to continue working in schools. This is a plus for all students, and especially those furthest from opportunity, who suffer most significantly from teacher turnover.²¹

²⁰ Effect size = .92, as gauged by a pre-/post-assessment using the Collective Efficacy in Instructional Strategies subscale of the *Collective Teacher Beliefs Scale*

²¹ Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond, 2017

EVIDENCE IN ACTION

Put evidence into action in your own school community.

| | | | |
|--|---|---|--|
|  | Use your heart, and look for the social and emotional factors at play: |  | Use your head, and push your own thinking and understanding: |
| <p>As you think about how to collect different types of evidence using a broader set of tools, consider Mary and Sarah's robust take on measurement. Here are some key components that contributed to their success:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1 Build in multiple moments for data collection in order to account for the influence of other factors on the behaviors you observe.2 Bring others into the process of collection, analysis, and reporting; it will help compensate for bias.3 Think about testing as another form of empathy; it's a chance to build relationships with others through careful observation and thoughtful feedback. | | <p>Questions to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">? How do other people in your school community define success?? Are you willing to accept evidence that your idea is a bust, or that you need to change your practice?? Rather than focusing on the right answer, are you asking the right question? | |
| | |  | Use your hands, and put these methods into action in your classroom and school: |
| | | <p>Interested in expanding your idea about what evidence of impact can look like in classrooms? Try "How" and "What" Grades, from our collection of Equitable Learning Practices.</p> | |

Building Block #5

COLLABORATION

ONE PLUS ONE EQUALS THREE

BUILDING BELIEF THROUGH COLLABORATION

Transformational school change happens when teachers and leaders not only work together, but honor one another as equal partners. This type of collaboration has the potential to deconstruct typical power structures, create distributed leadership, shared vision, and psychological safety, and model the style of communication we hope students learn in school.

By collaborating, we do not mean simply being in rooms together, granting permission, or offering support. When educators agree to work together as partners, across roles and differences and aligned to a common vision, it is clear that both adults and students benefit. Research notes that principals are most effective when they dedicate time to working, as equals, alongside teachers and other principals towards clear, common goals.²² Fueled by a collective sense of responsibility for student learning, principals and teachers who effectively collaborate tend to set high expectations for students and consider multiple measures of student success.

²²Louis, et al., 2010

“When we look at everyone as a learner and a teacher, regardless of their credentials or years of experience, we’re often... surprised by new ideas, concepts, strategies, and passions. Reciprocity is the inevitable outcome of a true partnership.”

Jim Knight
Senior Partner, Instructional Coaching Group
Research Associate, Center for Research on Learning,
University of Kansas





47

Teachers participated

647

Students involved

65%

Students received free and
reduced price lunch

SPARKING JOY FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

How a teacher and principal worked together to design for increased belonging among their colleagues

At P.S. 153 in The Bronx, first grade teacher Meghan Brady considered taking more risks in her classroom. After one of our first design thinking workshops, she set out to interview her students to better understand what they wanted out of their learning experiences. But she had several concerns: what if students' interests would extend beyond the scope of her assigned curriculum or expertise? Would experimenting with new ideas put her in hot water with her colleagues or the administration?

Meghan's nerves settled when she remembered she wouldn't have to go it alone. Meghan and her principal participated alongside each other as members of our New York City District 11 Chapter, mutually interested in redesigning conditions

in their school. At P.S. 153, design teams comprised of administrators and teachers surfaced student needs that revolved around a similar theme: the school week can be long, stressful, and in some cases, demotivating.

The administrator-teacher teams designed solutions to boost students' love of learning, including their sense of wonder and belonging. Meghan prototyped "Fun Fridays," where she redesigned lessons at the end of the week to make them more creative and experimental. Students raved about it and the administration eagerly scaled the prototype across the school.

Meghan's principal saw opportunities for redesign from a different angle. Her stakeholders were not only students, but also her teaching staff. She capitalized on the success of Fun Fridays and looked for ideas to boost joy and belonging among teachers, too. The principal ran creative warmups at staff meetings, supported teachers to observe each other's classrooms and post to social media, and tried many more innovative ideas that led to measurable improvement in teachers' satisfaction and feeling of community.

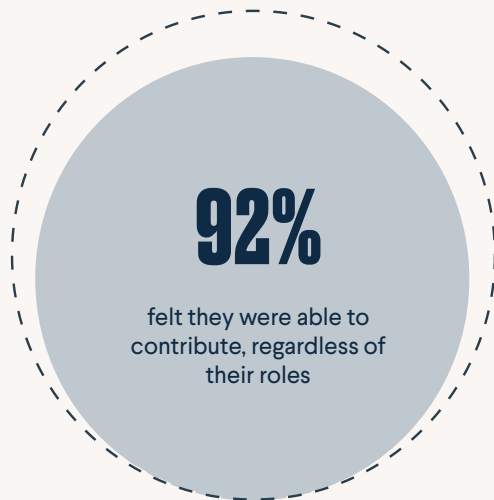
Meghan and her principal may hold different positions at P.S. 153, but that hasn't prevented them from collaborating to reimagine the school experience for students and adults, alike. Their different positions made for strong, cross-role collaboration that leveraged their unique perspectives and expertise. In fact, it is very likely because of the administrator-teacher partnership that innovation has taken root at P.S. 153 so quickly and so widely.

“So many educators at my school are involved and that’s key. We’re interested in showing off the great work that’s happening, because there’s a lot that doesn’t get enough attention. This work has helped us shine a light on those things, and has brought us closer together as a community.”

Meghan Brady
1st Grade Teacher, P.S. 153 Helen Keller
The Bronx, New York



IMPACT ACROSS OUR COMMUNITY






Design teams are realizing that effective solutions require not just activation, but meaningful and authentic collaboration between administrators and teachers. Among participants on principal-teacher teams, we've observed that:

These data are indications that true partnership is forming across differences in role, which is key to school change. Improving schools and communities is an “adaptive problem,” with no known answer, and for which no individual has the resources or authority to create change.²³ Reaching effective solutions for such adaptive problems requires collaboration among a wide range of stakeholders. Those who are experiencing the change must be involved in the process.

²³ Kania and Kramer, 2011

COLLABORATION IN ACTION

Put collaboration into action in your school community.

| | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
|  | Use your heart, and look for the social and emotional factors at play: |  | Use your head, and push your own thinking and understanding: |
| <p>As you think about how to move teachers and principals from sharing a space to truly collaborating, consider Meghan’s experience designing from a place of mutual interest with her principal. Here are some key components that contributed to her success:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1 Working in the same building doesn’t mean you’ll automatically agree about your purpose for being there, so start by drafting a common vision.2 Consider the power dynamics at play; think about how behaviors in your group are a reflection of titles, experience, and perceived expertise.3 As you experiment with new ways of behaving with colleagues, you’ll make mistakes. Approach this new social contract with humility and generosity. | | <p>Questions to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">? Who do I need on my team?? When should I adapt my beliefs and practice, and when should I hold firm?? Who is at the table? Whose voices are and are not being heard? | |
| | |  | Use your hands, and put these methods into action in your classroom and school: |
| | | <p>Interested in catalyzing collaboration that spans roles and differences? Try Student-Led Parent-Teacher Conferences, from our collection of Equitable Learning Practices.</p> | |



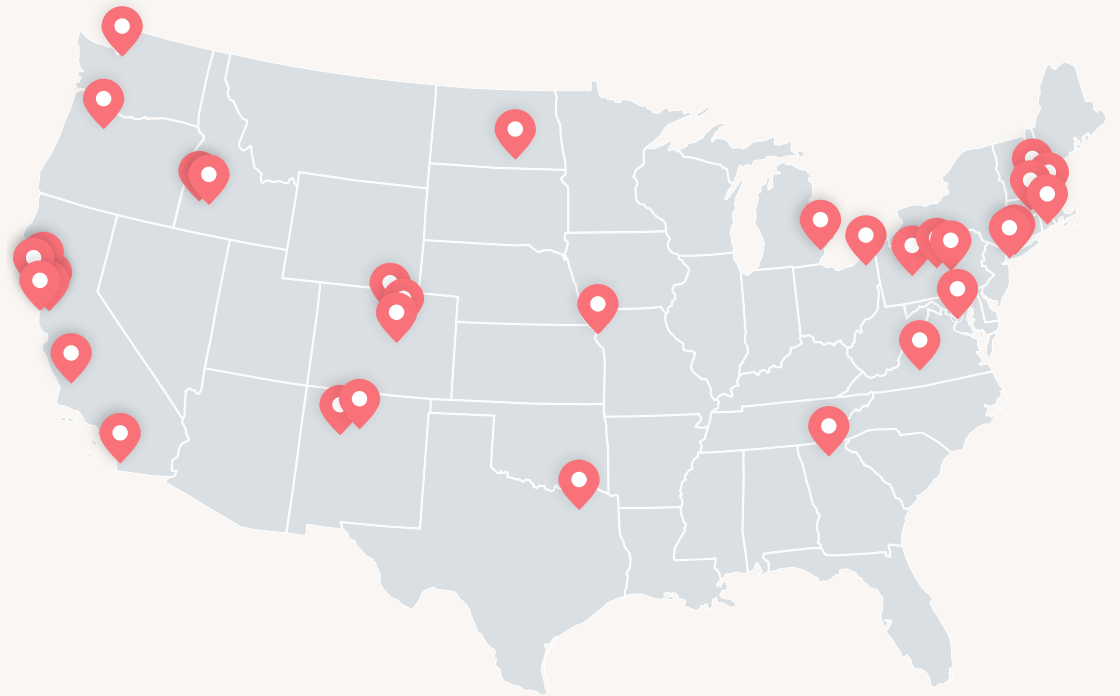
ABOUT US

OUR PROGRAM

What unites The Teachers Guild and School Retool is the belief that educators are the innovators our schools and communities have been waiting for. Our two organizations merged to create a professional learning community that catalyzes educators' belief that they can create equitable change, by and for themselves. Our north star metric is collective efficacy, and we have gathered evidence that over 95% of our members believe in their ability to positively affect students and 93% design with particular students in mind. Together, our programs have a national network of 15,000 teachers and school principals from 30+ regions, and a global network of over 100,000 followers. Our collaboration was motivated by our communities, who noted that the complexity in education today requires teachers and leaders to work alongside each other. Going forward, we're excited about shifting towards a more community-led approach, where educators are empowered to lead equitable change in their own school communities.



The Teachers Guild x School Retool community is both broad and deep. We connect with over 100,000 followers globally with the Design Thinking for Educators Toolkit and 12,000 members online from past digital design challenges. Across the U.S., we have partnered to launch 30 Chapters that have impacted 850+ schools, and built a network of 2,500 educators and 30+ coaches. From a school leadership perspective, School Retool has worked with nearly 1,100 principals from over 800 schools in almost 400 districts. That means there are over 600,000 students in the U.S. who have a school leader who has experienced the School Retool fellowship. The Teachers Guild and School Retool have been dedicated to partnering with underinvested schools and districts through our Chapters and Cohort programs. Through these programs, we have served school communities where 82% of students come from underrepresented minority backgrounds, compared to 52% nationally; 67% of students qualify for free and reduced-price meals, as compared to 48% nationally; and 20% of students are English language learners, compared to 13% nationally.

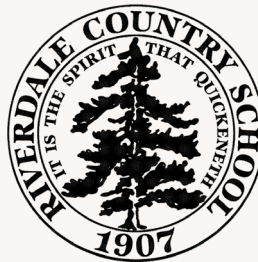


OUR SUPPORTERS

The work of The Teachers Guild and School Retool has been inspired by more than 40 years of research and practice by organizations dedicated to innovation and design, school change, and mindset growth. We are indebted to IDEO, K-12 lab at Stanford's d.school, Riverdale Country School, Hewlett Foundation, Carnegie Corporation, Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, and many more for their guidance and generosity. These relationships have afforded us the freedom to take risks and groups of critical friends at pivotal moments.

IDEO

d.K12 LAB
NETWORK



Chan
Zuckerberg
Initiative 

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“The educational community’s failure to help teachers, administrators, and parents work through their feelings about change is a major obstacle to achieving fundamental educational reform... But changing [beliefs, attitudes, and relationships] is complex... These components are connected to people’s feelings about themselves, their colleagues, and their students. If educators do not help teachers with their feelings, the current wave of reform will have as little lasting effect as the last one.”

Julian Weissglass

Professor Emeritus, Department of Education, UC Santa Barbara
Director, National Coalition for Equity in Education