

# **"If You Can't Kill Them, Co-Opt Them": How Educational Reformers Appropriate Teachers' Voice and Agency**

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# Philanthropy Roundtable (2018)



# Teach Plus Founder

*“Teacher-voice movement connect[s] direct teaching experience with the bigger picture of education reform”*  
(Coggins, 2015)





# Seven Results of the Charter-School Revolution

**The most consequential developments after 25 years of charter schools.**

Brandon Wright, Bruno Manno, Chester Finn | Philanthropy Magazine Fall 2016 | K-12 Education

Groups like TNTP (formerly The New Teacher Project), Leading Educators, Educators 4 Excellence, 4.0 Schools, Teach Plus, and the National Academy of Advanced Teacher Education have likewise worked with charter schools to pull impressive new talent into education. And some charters, frustrated by the slipshod quality, iffy content, long timelines, low stature, and high cost of conventional teacher-college programs, have launched their own alternatives. Match Education in Boston created the Charles Sposato Graduate School of

[Post](#)

# The Market for ‘teacher Voice’

By Allison Kimmel

AEIdeas

July 25, 2012



The teachers unions are under attack—and not just from Scott Walker. In a recent white paper, [Mitt Romney](#) blamed the unions for gridlock and stagnation in American education. In the public discourse, films such as *Waiting for Superman* vilify union leaders and frame the unions as enemies of education reform. It's fair to say even President Obama and the unions have a rocky relationship, as the administration has [supported initiatives](#) that unions have long opposed, such as charter schools and tenure reform. Public dissatisfaction with the unions is mounting, and the ways in which teachers and the groups that represent them respond will shape the profession for years to come.



**Cooptation** is the elite strategy of using apparently cooperative practices to absorb those who seek change – to make them work with elites without giving them any new advantages. When cooptation is successful, those who seek change alter their positions when working with elites, hoping to gain new strategic advantages through compromising, but those advantages do not come and instead the elites' position prevails. The ultimate consequence is that the challengers become politically irrelevant.

(Holdo, 2019, p. 444)

# Background

## Literature Review

- **Teacher activism and policy advocacy** (Anderson & Cohen, 2018; Aydarova, Rigney, & Dana, 2021, 2022; Derrington & Anderson, 2020; Good et al., 2017; Nuñez, Michie, & Konkol, 2015; Ravitch, 2020; White, 2020)
- **Intermediary organizations' (IOs) involvement in the educational reform movement** (Scott & Jabbar, 2014; Scott et al. 2014; Debray et al., 2014; Singer & Brewer, 2021)

## Research Question

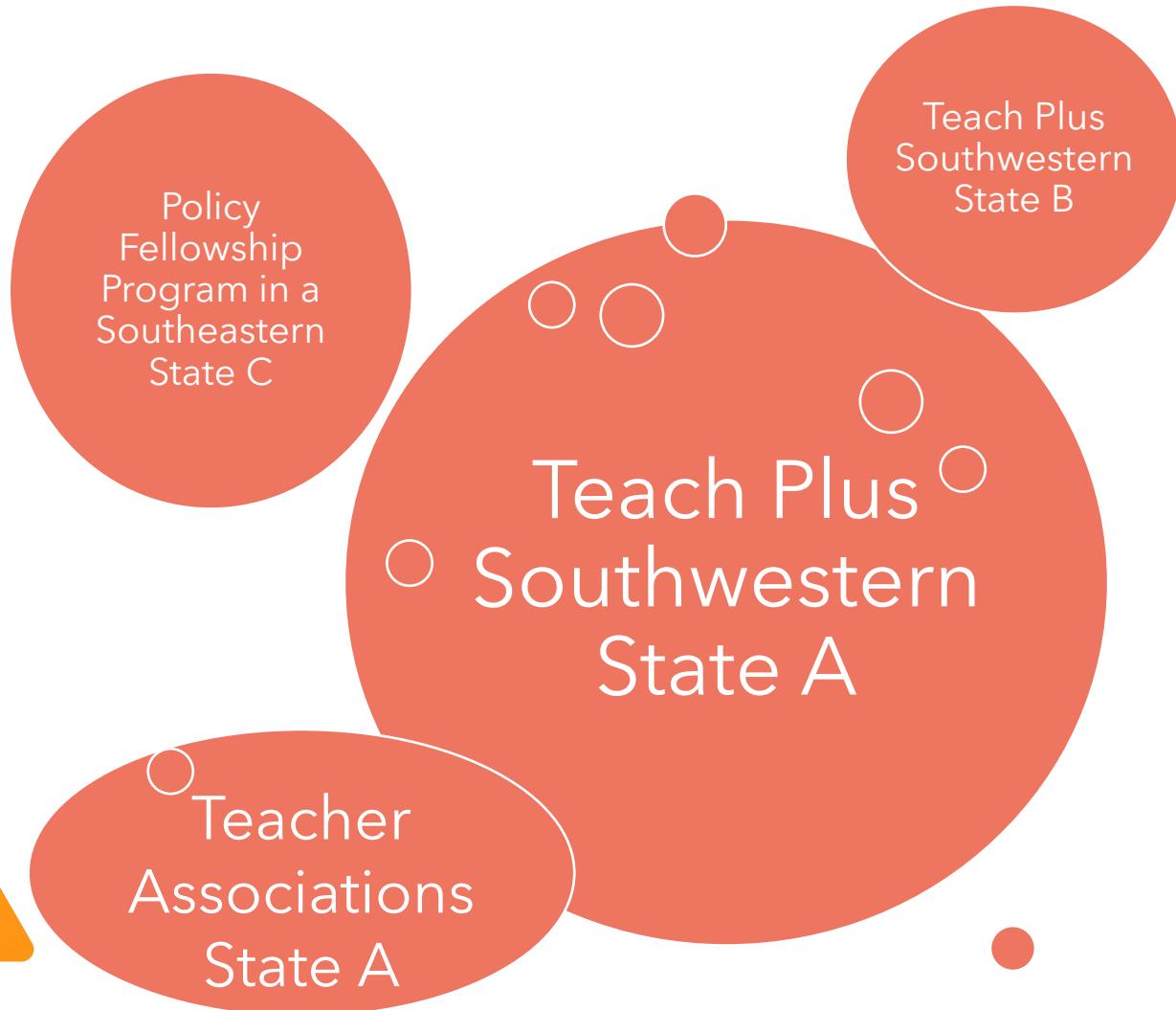
- What happens when intermediary organizations embedded in the disruptive educational reform movement train teachers to participate in policy advocacy?

# Theoretical Foundations

- **Policy as performance** (Aydarova, 2019, 2022; Anderson, 2007; Edelman, 1988; Koyama, 2010, 2013; Smith et al., 2004)
- **Policy advocacy** (Gen & Wright, 2013)
- **Social movement studies** (Einwohner et al., 2021; Holdo, 2019; Tormos, 2017)



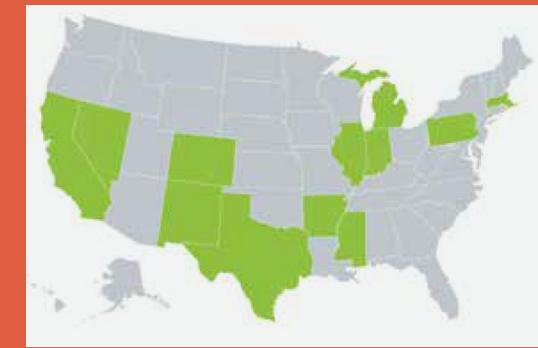
# Multiple Case Study Design (Stake, 2008)



## Data Sources

Interviews	14
Op-Eds	92
Policy Briefs	20
Videos of Testimonies	8
Training Materials	6
Social Media Posts	89
Media Articles	4
Reports	12

# Teach Plus



- Teacher Voice Organization (501(c))
- Piloted in 2007, incorporated in 2009, currently - 12 state branches
- Incubated at the Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy in Cambridge, Massachusetts
- Moved from urban centers to state-level programs
- Policy Fellowship Program for Classroom Teachers
  - One-year commitment
  - \$1500 stipend

## Teach Plus Teacher Leaders

**428**

Leading instructional change in their schools and districts

**805**

Participating in instructional practice programs led by Teach Plus teacher leaders

**399**

Leading policy and systems change in their district and state

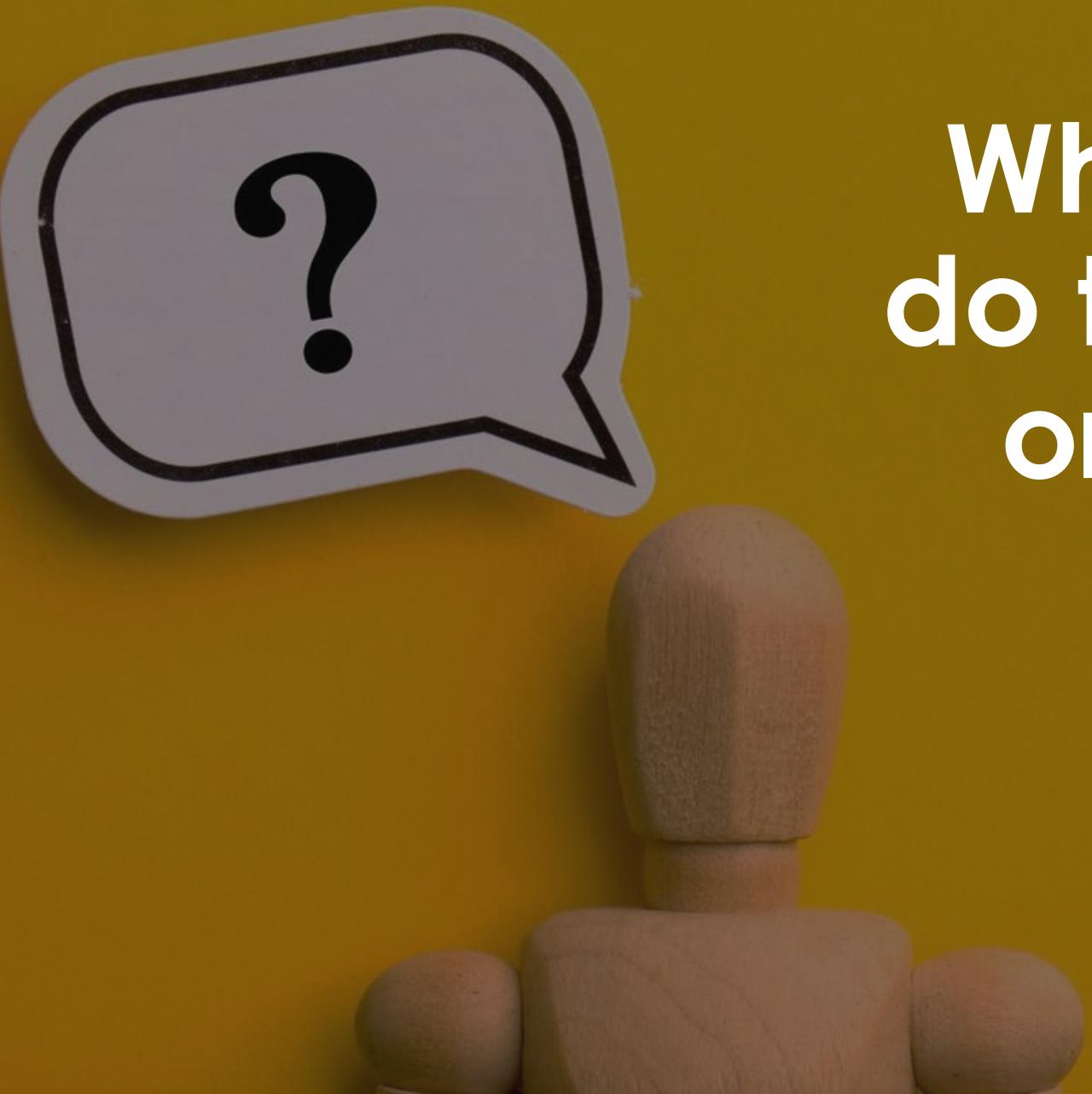
**3,400**

Active participants in the Teach Plus Network

# Funding

Total  
Revenue  
Reported in  
2020  
\$11,878,197

- + Academica Nevada
- + Albuquerque Community Foundation
- + Ballmer Group
- + Barr Foundation
- + Berkeley School District 87
- + Bernstein Family Foundation
- + Best in Class Fund at Communities Foundation of Texas
- + Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- + The Boone Family Foundation
- + Byrne Family Foundation
- + CME Group Foundation
- + Carnegie Corporation of New York
- + Crown Family Philanthropies
- + Daniels Fund
- + Finnegan Family Foundation
- + Lloyd A. Fry Foundation
- + The Grable Foundation
- + Grand Victoria Foundation
- + Harmony Public Schools
- + The Heinz Endowments
- + Henry L. Hillman Foundation
- + Houston Endowment
- + IMC Chicago Charitable Foundation
- + The Joyce Foundation
- + Kokomo School Corporation
- + The Mind Trust
- + Lloyd A. Fry Foundation
- + The Osa Foundation
- + The Meadows Foundation
- + Michael & Susan Dell Foundation
- + Neubauer Family Foundation
- + Opportunity180
- + Polk Bros. Foundation
- + The Powell Foundation
- + Robert R. McCormick Foundation
- + Rose Community Foundation
- + Sagalyn Family Fund
- + Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies
- + Sid W. Richardson Foundation
- + Steans Family Foundation
- + Thornburg Foundation
- + W. Clement & Jessie V. Stone Foundation
- + The Walton Family Foundation
- + William Penn Foundation
- + The Yellow Chair Foundation
- + And individual donors and those who wish to remain anonymous



What strategies  
do teacher voice  
organizations  
use?

# “Recruit and Select Excellent Teachers”

When we met with the Education Commissioner, it was more of a, "Hey, you guys are **the cream of the crop of the educators**. Help me decide what to do to make COVID work." So, that was him asking for our advice. (Former Fellow, Interview 8)

## *Strong candidate pool*

- Teacher of the year nominees and awardees
- Recipients of various scholarships and fellowships
- Multiple years of experience
- Teachers already active in advocacy and activism

## *Tough selection process*

- Rigorous application and multi-stage interview process



# “Develop and Coach”



*Participants are trained to tell their stories to influence policymakers and decision-makers*

We talk about how to **leverage the stories** that we have in the classroom but use that in a way that can affect policy change. So, they talked about how to balance using your story in the testimony, but then also how to make recommendations that are going to make sense to policymakers.  
(Fellow, Interview 6)

# “Connect and Empower”- Networks of Power

A goal [is] to familiarize us with the people with some power and how to get in touch with them, because they usually end with, ‘Here's my email and phone number. Feel free to reach out to me.’ (Fellow, Interview 5)

- Conversations with major decision-makers (Commissioner, legislators, mayors, etc.)
- Informal gatherings (dinners with superintendents)
- Nominations and support for state-level committee and task force service
- Invitations to testify for the legislative committees and state commissions

# Co-opt Teacher Voices

***Small groups focus on policy issues that are determined by the organization***

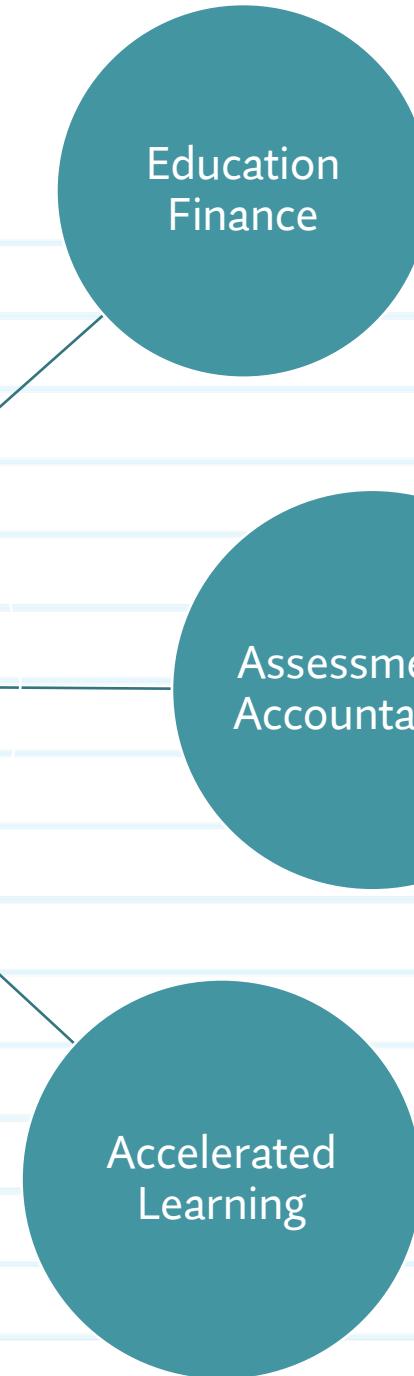
[TeachPlus] definitely have their ideas and push you towards what they're talking about or what they think the buzzwords are. (Fellow, Interview 14)



# Working Groups



# TEACH +PLUS



- Merit-based pay
- Standardized Tests
- School Assessments
- Learning Recovery

# Minimize Dissent

***Alternative pursuits are downplayed, sidelined, silenced, or replaced***

I wanted to work on other issues, but I had to swallow it so that we could have a united front when we're going to the legislature. (Former Fellow, Interview 8)



Program  
Staff

Senior  
Fellow

Specific  
Policy Area

Fellow

Fellow

Fellow

Concrete Advocacy Products





**What are the  
effects?**

# Fellows' Policy Advocacy Activities



- Policy briefs
- Surveys and research
- Testimonies
- Committee service at the state level
- Op-Eds
- Social media campaigns
- Bill proposal and passage
- Policy changes at the district level

We wrote a bill that would require teachers to do professional development in trauma-informed instruction, and that became law. (Former Fellow, Interview 11)

# Corporate Reform: Merit Pay for Teachers

Increase Pay for All Teachers and School Personnel

Merit Pay for Teachers

Teach Plus Fellows' Testimonies

Teacher Associations

Teachers and Former Fellows

Op-Eds

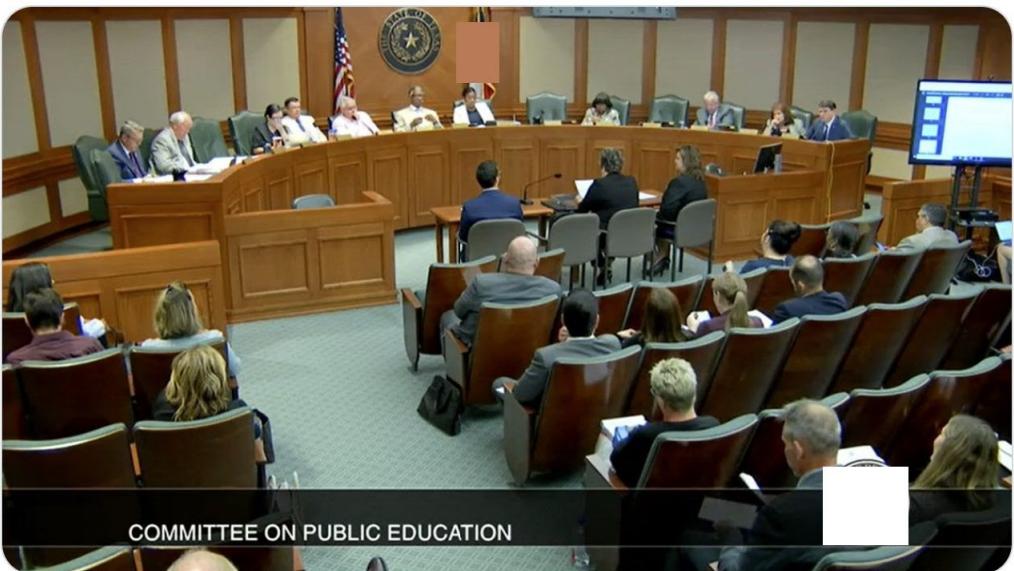
Social Media Campaigns

“We advocate for a new compensation system with three levels that teachers progress through based on accomplishments, including excellence in the classroom, as demonstrated through successful annual evaluations and proof of student learning [based growth or value-added scores]” (TeachPlus, 2011, p. 4)

# Fellows' Support for Merit Pay



Policy Fellow Alum [REDACTED] gave testimony at the House Public Education Committee in favor of the [REDACTED] spoke about the impact [REDACTED] has in growing her as professional, increasing her compensation & keeping her in the classroom for a 3rd decade.



8

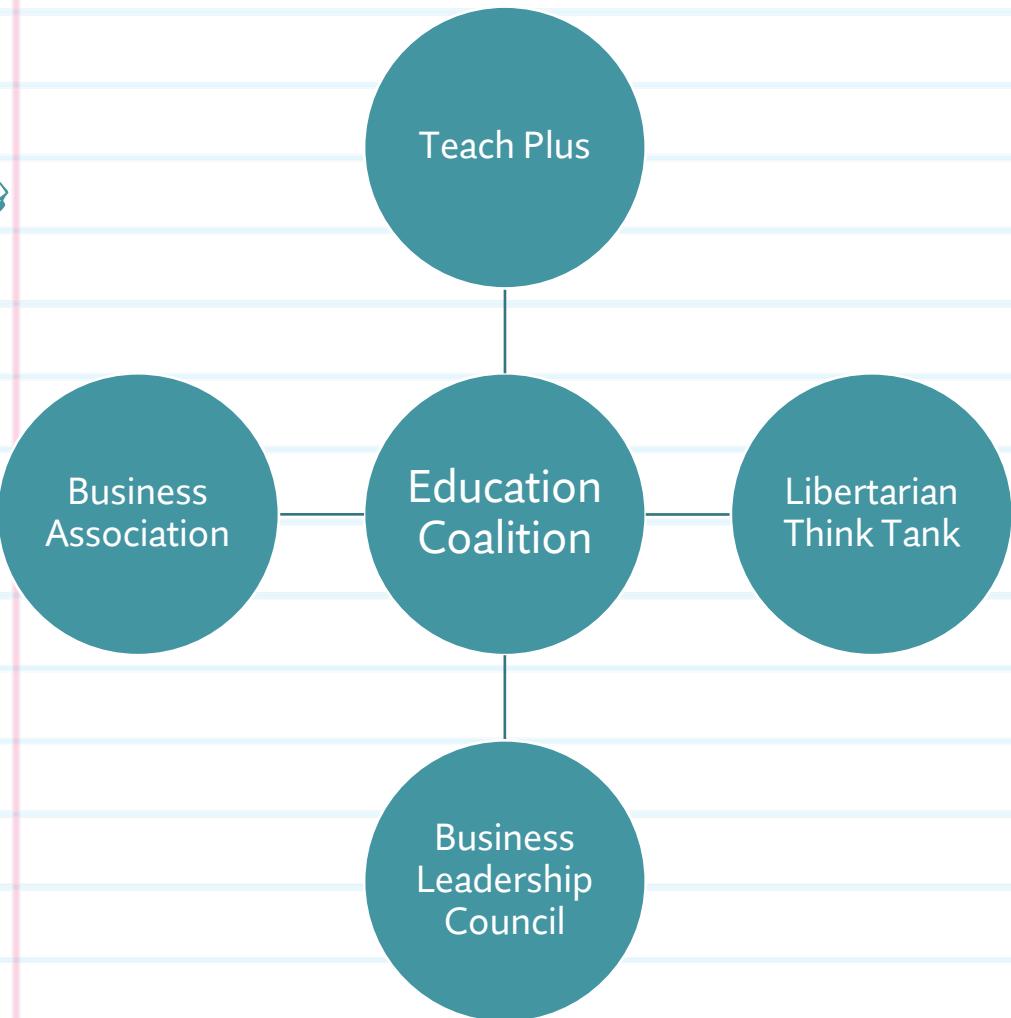


Merit pay “has the ability to serve as a long-term investment in the retention of highly effective teachers and the state needs to leverage its benefits so there is buy-in from most, if not all, districts across the state.” (Op-Ed 2023)

Specifically, [merit pay] was brought up. Our district a few years ago had a teacher panel come together to decide whether we wanted to bring it into the district, and I got to be a part of that panel. And we almost unanimously agreed that we did not want it as part of our district, so we rejected it.

But then hearing these other teachers from different districts talk about how it was working for their schools, I was like, "I don't know. That's interesting, maybe that would be something for us to reconsider," especially if the [base pay] isn't raised, and we can't get any help from the state that way. I reached out to Teach Plus to ask if maybe I could talk to the working group or some of the leaders about that. It might be something that I want to bring to our district leaders and just see if it's something that we should reconsider or look at again. (Fellow, Interview 6)

# Coalition for Curriculum Reform



“High Quality Instructional Materials”  
“Curriculum Transparency”

Many teachers are currently working two jobs—designing lessons and teaching them—which is contributing to their exhaustion and teacher shortages. Access to high-quality instructional material can reduce teacher workloads and play a critical role in delivering quality education to our students.  
(Teach Plus Director, 2023)

# Critical Vigilance

Developing and maintaining a critical stance towards neoliberal policies and market-based reforms (Anderson & Cohen, 2018)

- Awareness of policy actors who promote corporate reforms
- “Who's behind it?”
- “What are they trying to support?”
- Who is funding the organization?
- What is its history?
- How is the organization's vision aligned with the vision of professional organizations, professional associations, and community activists?



# Thank you!

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