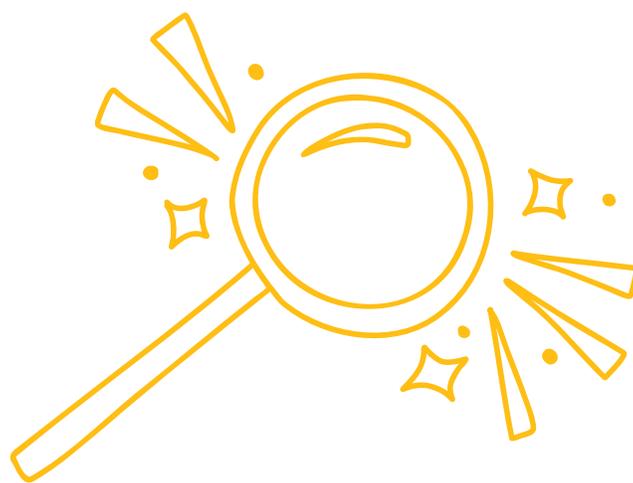


Where Curiosity and **LEADERSHIP UNITE**

2021 TEACHER LEADERSHIP REPORT







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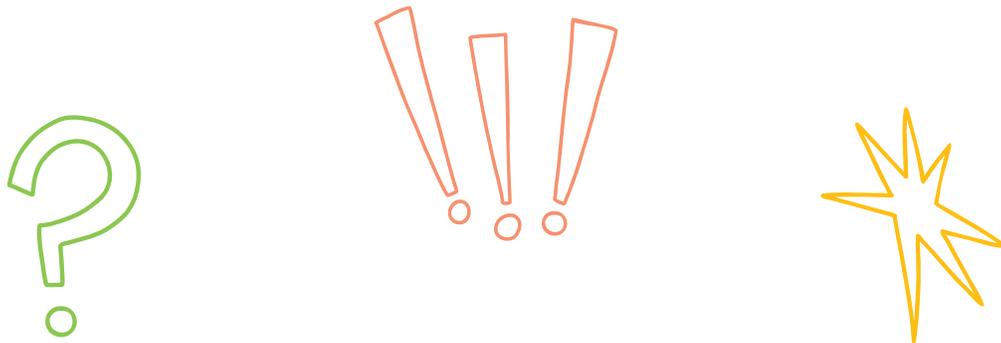
Introduction

Curiosity drives the teachers highlighted in this year's *Teacher Leadership Report* and at the 16th Annual Teacher Leadership Institute. They continuously ask how they can further improve their practice and better support the students in their classroom and beyond. They know that inquiry isn't just about asking questions but is also about seeking answers and solutions. Modeling with their own inquiry journeys, these teachers support students in asking their own questions and seeking ways to learn. And by seeking ways to create equitable and inclusive classrooms to best support all students, these teacher leaders are making a positive impact on education in Arizona.

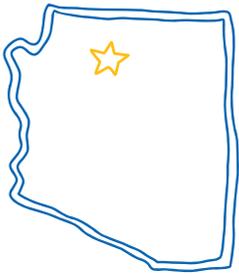
The first pages of this publication feature the stories of five Arizona teacher leaders and the role curiosity plays in their leadership, followed by an overview of the 22 Arizona TeacherSolutions® Team members' inquiry goal-setting projects. Each year, these teacher leaders develop a goal that matters to them and then set out to seek change and learning by working toward their desired outcome.

When teachers share their stories, others see the potential in themselves. The teacher leaders highlighted here aren't so unlike you. They have worked to navigate the complexities of the COVID-19 pandemic, worked to find effectiveness in varied learning settings and delivery modalities, and continue to work on finding innovative ways to meet the needs of their students and their students' families. In this report, you will see the ways these educators make instructional decisions that honor the humanity of their students and the diversity of their stories and backgrounds.

After a year that has continued to challenge Arizona educators in new ways, we hope the stories included here and at the 16th Annual Teacher Leadership Institute inspire you to see your teaching practice with renewed vision and a spirit of inquiry. Thank you for all you do.



We hope the stories included here inspire you to see your teaching practice with renewed vision and a spirit of inquiry.



Adrian Alvarez

Science Teacher, Grand Canyon School,
Grand Canyon Unified School District

Watch Adrian Alvarez discuss curiosity and leadership at bit.ly/azteacherleader_alvarez



Adrian Alvarez doesn't need to teach her students how to become scientists. They already are.

"We start naturally as scientists. We're inquisitive by nature," she notes. "Sometimes we get that sort of folded out of us; we get too regimented or routinized and think that we shouldn't take an active role in our own learning when, in fact, we are the driving force; we are the active role in our own learning. Inquiry plays an incredible part in our work as teachers, but specifically as science teachers, because we're always asking questions that hopefully lead to evidence to support answers that then drive new questions. We're never done asking questions."

Alvarez teaches middle and high school science at Grand Canyon School, the only school in the country to be located within a national park. This provides students and teachers with an especially unique learning environment. Students are often from nearby reservations or the children of Grand Canyon National Park employees.

In the past few years, Alvarez has grown how she uses inquiry in her teaching to focus especially on place-based phenomena. She explains that "the idea of place-based learning—or place-based phenomena—is really about asking 'are you making connections to the world right around you?' and how can we investigate those things that are connected to us so that we can understand why they're happening but also why they mean something to us." That approach also leads to a conversation about justice-focused learning that asks if and how investigations are improving the space and lives of others.



“My hope is to support students by incorporating their strengths and cultivating their desire to learn about the ideas that interest them the most.”

“Many of our students are having these big conversations related to very serious issues in our community, like uranium mining around the Grand Canyon and the repeal of a 20-year ban,” she shares. “Lots of them have ancestors and family who were on the reservation when the original mines were in operation and many have multitudes of autoimmune deficiencies and disorders because of it.”

Alvarez also recognizes how inquiry requires vulnerability. With a smile, she notes that sometimes people would rather ‘fake it till you make it’ when it comes to not knowing something. She works to acknowledge the inherent vulnerability but also the freedom that comes with not understanding something. That opens up the opportunities to research, ask others what they’re thinking and experiencing, and to collaborate, she explains. She also continually affirms every student’s identity as a scientist. She helps them remember that if something does not work out as intended, their efforts were still useful, as they likely learned something in that process.

“My hope is to support students by incorporating their strengths and cultivating their desire to learn about the ideas that interest them the most,” she continues. “I plan opportunities for students to be empowered by knowledge; to share ideas; to make connections to the natural world and to protect the environment; to contribute to learning environments where they can explore and investigate.”

Alvarez aims to teach in the kind of classroom professor and author Dr. Christopher Emdin has described “that is a microcosm of the world you want to live in, not a replication of the world we currently have” and “a vision for a future not yet realized.”

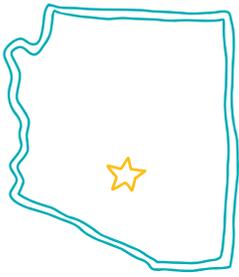
She is working “to create future leaders by providing spaces and models for valuing everyone’s humanity,” she says. “Our students create these spaces with us, where we envision a future built upon the strength of our diversity and support by consensus and collaboration; a future that encourages exploration and values science.”

1. How do you see inquiry and equity present in Alvarez’s practice?

2. In what ways can you help support students in investigating their curiosities?

3. Are there ways you can explore place-based phenomena in your classroom?





Estevan Carreon

Special Education Teacher, Independence High School,
Glendale Union High School District

Watch Estevan Carreon discuss curiosity and leadership at bit.ly/azteacherleader_carreon



Whether reviewing a math lesson or talking with a student about their mental well-being, Estevan Carreon brings a calming and steady demeanor. He can handily teach content with the students he supports as a special education teacher but knows his role expands beyond academics.

“My hope for each of my students is that they are able to learn and utilize skills that will allow them to be successful in a general education environment,” he explains. “In my class, I want them to experience a teacher who is not going to judge or criticize them for their behaviors but, instead, will help them to overcome these challenges.”

Carreon teaches at Independence High School in the Glendale Union High School District, specifically working with students in the social and emotional program. His students are often average to high academic achievers but who struggle with social and personal skills. Their behavior can sometimes be bizarre or off-putting—even violent, he explains.

He regularly meets one-on-one with his students—as well as with other students in general education classes who need his support—to talk about how they are doing socially and emotionally. That practice has continued even while teaching in a virtual classroom.



UNITOWN

ANYTOWN





“My students continue to struggle with their development on a social and emotional level,” he says about the past school year. “Not being able to interact with their peers or with caring adults has definitely hindered that development. For me, embracing inquiry by looking for the best possible solutions for my students has been one of the more difficult, yet also the most rewarding, part of virtual teaching.”

Carreon helps students build their own curiosity about how to approach the challenges they face and also to recognize the successes they encounter.

Being alert to finding ways to support the emotional and mental health of more students led Carreon to establish both the Unitown and Anytown programs in his district. Originally based on the Unitown youth leadership camps begun in the 1950s by the National Conference for Community and Justice, the two Glendale Union camps have grown into their own established programs, covering important, but heavy, topics like dating violence, abuse, and suicide prevention. Unitown is an intense four-day camp for teacher-selected juniors and seniors held on high school campuses, while Anytown is a somewhat less-intense program for freshmen and sophomores in preparation to likely attend Unitown later.

Carreon makes two promises about the Unitown camp: “I promise you that you will absolutely be uncomfortable at times and that you will absolutely always be safe, both physically and emotionally, as we will all be talking about some very serious topics.”

Carreon generally hosts four camps a year and does not recall a time when he did not have to contact the police, a student’s family, or a social service agency about something disclosed at the camp like sexual assault, suicidal ideation, or neglect.

“The impact that I have been able to have on the students through these experiences has been life changing for me,” Carreon says. But the experiences also have an authentic impact on the students. “It’s a very life-changing and life-saving experience.”

In 2016, a murder-suicide on campus devastated the community.

“I did not know how we, as a faculty, would ever be able to start the healing,” he says. “Amazingly, it was my Unitown graduates who provided the healing we needed. A week after the shooting, completely on their own, they organized a ‘thank you assembly’ for our staff. It took place before school and included some very heartfelt moments from students who thanked us as their protectors. These students were

suffering through this traumatic event, and yet they did something for their teachers that left us speechless and emotional.”

“When I spoke with the student leaders who organized the assembly, they credited their actions to what they had learned at Unitown about suicide prevention, dating violence, and other heavy topics not traditionally talked about at school.”

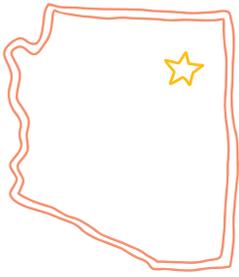
While the pandemic has changed how Unitown and Anytown currently operate, Carreon continues to work toward expanding these opportunities across the district, always seeking ways to better support the entire well-being of Glendale Union students.

“I want them to experience a teacher who is not going to judge or criticize them for their behaviors but, instead, will help them to overcome these challenges.”

1. How do you see inquiry and equity present in Carreon’s practice?

2. In what ways have you created an environment that supports the social-emotional needs of both you and the students you serve?

3. Are you aware of and actively seeking additional resources to support the social-emotional needs of students in your space?



Sarah Garcia, NBCT

English Teacher, Ganado High School,
Ganado Unified School District

Watch Sarah Garcia discuss curiosity and leadership at bit.ly/azteacherleader_garcia



Known as *Lok'aah niteel* in Diné, the city of Ganado sits on the Navajo Nation and is home to about 1,500 people, including English teacher Sarah Garcia. While Garcia did not grow up there, she has become an important member of the Ganado community over the past 11 years.

As a young adult, Garcia resisted the urge she felt to become a teacher. She grew up in a lower-income family and initially wanted a job that would allow her to help her parents buy a new house or car. But

she was challenged by the fact that she didn't earn great grades as a student, and a teacher once told her she would never go to college. Thankfully, a few of her high school teachers did direct her to resources that would help her attend college and then also find a passion for teaching. She encountered further obstacles while in college but persevered to become the first in her family to graduate, earning a bachelor's degree in secondary education.

"I was kind of scared to share those experiences with my students," Garcia says about beginning her teaching career. "But when I started sharing them, that's the thing they now remember most."



Now, her students at Ganado High School hear about Garcia's life, her preschool-aged daughter, the books and TV shows she's been enjoying, and how she's expanding her own learning. She jokes and laughs with her students but also shares about the difficulties she's encountered.

"They're not going to remember semicolons," she says, "but they're going to remember that someone cared about them and wants them to do well—and tells them that they can do it. And it's not just that I'm telling them they can do it, I've proven that they can do it."

Students who have left Ganado to attend college have let Garcia know that her voice and stories encouraged them at moments when the culture shock of living outside the reservation—or the challenges of school and work—felt overwhelming.

"I think my biggest job is to convince my students that they deserve more; that they deserve success," she says.

Garcia continually asks herself how she can better support her students.

"I didn't realize when I was a novice that teaching would incorporate so much creative thinking and problem-solving," she says. "Every day is a chance to learn and adapt, so I can move toward being a better teacher for my students."

The first time Garcia seriously questioned the impact she was having on her students, she decided to pursue National Board Certification. As she worked to complete the components for certification, her husband, Jeremy Nelson, also a teacher at Ganado High School, helped students prepare two sets of cupcakes for the day she was to find out if she had achieved certification: one batch said *Congratulations!*, the other said *You'll do it next time!*

Garcia became a National Board Certified Teacher in English Language Arts in Adolescence and Young Adulthood in 2017. As she enjoyed the

Congratulations! cupcakes with her students that day, she remembers she told them how much it meant for them to be a part of that journey with her.

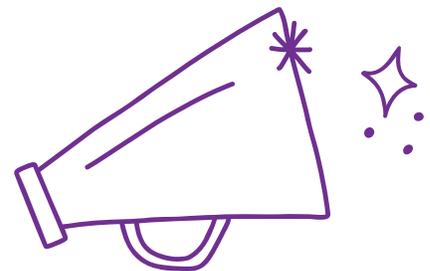
"This is one of the hardest things I've done in my professional career. Thank you, guys, for not giving up on me as a teacher and for helping me," she remembers. "I felt like it was a part of their success too." Garcia continues to build up the teachers around her in Ganado and beyond as a National Board Candidate Support Provider, supporting a network of current candidates and new National Board Certified Teachers at area schools.

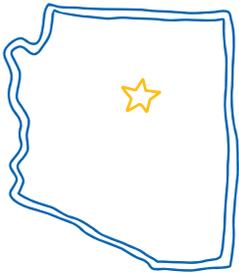
1. How do you see inquiry and equity present in Garcia's practice?

2. In what ways do you embrace transparency to relate to the students in your space?

3. How do you support students in seeing their full potential and envisioning their future opportunities?

"I think my biggest job is to convince my students that they deserve more; that they deserve success."





Jillian Hernández

Fifth-Grade Teacher, Puente de Hózhó Elementary School,
Flagstaff Unified School District

Watch Jillian Hernández discuss curiosity and leadership at bit.ly/azteacherleader_hernandez



As fifth-grade teacher Jillian Hernández demonstrated step-by-step on her shared screen how to calculate the volume of a prism, one student exclaimed over Zoom, "I understand what I did wrong!"

"Oh, tell us! I love hearing about your learning," Hernández immediately responded. The student explained to her teacher and classmates her original approach, then what changes she made to get the correct answer.

Hernández teaches at Flagstaff Unified School District's Puente de Hózhó Elementary School, a trilingual International Baccalaureate Candidate School with students learning in Diné/English and Spanish/English. She creates a classroom culture with her students that nurtures inquiry and risk-taking.

"I think I provide a safe space for students to be who they are," she says. "This doesn't mean I don't challenge students or push them to grow in ways they sometimes don't think is possible. I profoundly believe





“To embrace inquiry means embracing my own mistakes, my own unlearning, and the fact that I don’t have many answers.”

in the power of my students. I believe that what we do in class matters and I think students engage and grow in my classroom because what we learn is relevant and often driven by their own inquiries.”

Hernández has not always approached her teaching practice in this way.

“I have always learned best when inquiry has been elevated,” she says, “but I lost my way for a while as a teacher. I felt the pressures to meet the external indicators of success placed on teachers daily. I lost my way for some years early on in my teaching. It was not until about 10 years into my teaching that I acknowledged—and that was a painful process—how I strayed from a path I once believed in.”

Hernández now prioritizes inquiry throughout her teaching.

“I include inquiry anytime I am planning and anytime I am working with a coworker,” she explains. “Together, we ask questions. We let these questions guide how we cocreate learning experiences for our students. We all think differently about how we assess student knowledge. I also have changed the way I present information or provide professional development.”

She shares with her students about her own learning as well.

On the first Tuesday in February, Hernández asked her class what they knew about Black History Month. “I’m still learning about this too,” she noted.

Much of Hernández’s personal learning has been related to social justice and equity. She says that “there are painful moments of unlearning that have led to deep reflection and growth. I have had to come to grips with my role as a white cisgender female in education in Arizona. I entered this profession wanting to make a difference but I was naive to the cultural learning, understanding, and decentering of myself that was needed to truly be a teacher who positively impacts children and colleagues.”

She urges teachers to recognize and lean into the discomfort they have around these discussions and ask questions about why they feel that discomfort.

“To embrace inquiry means embracing my own mistakes, my own unlearning, and the fact that I don’t have many answers,” she explains.

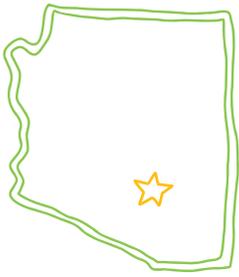
Encouraging her students to be inquirers, while leading from a place of inquiry herself, provides a foundation for her students to grow beyond her classroom.

“First and foremost, I always want students to leave me—leave the space that we’ve cocreated together—empowered. I want them to know that their voice and story matter. Their identities, both their ever-changing identities and the ones that are rooted in tradition and culture, matter. And that they’re change agents ... even at this age, they’re change agents.”

1. How do you see inquiry and equity present in Hernández’s practice?

2. In what ways does your practice create an inclusive and identity-affirming space for all students?

3. How do you model vulnerability and continuous learning for the students you serve?



Kimberly May

Fourth-Grade Teacher, Copper Basin K–8,
Florence Unified School District

Watch Kimberly May discuss curiosity and leadership at bit.ly/azteacherleader_may



“Throughout my entire career, inquiry has been my guiding light.”

When Kimberly May entered the teaching profession, she envisioned being a principal. After serving as an assistant principal for one year, that dream came true in 2011. While serving in that role for four years, her questions about funding for new projects led her to a newly created district position: director of federal programs.

“I enjoyed it, but I was no longer in the school building, and the school building is where I thrive,” she says. “I came back into the classroom in 2018, and it has been the best



experience ever. I have returned to my niche and find myself thriving in ways I've always imagined for myself."

As a principal, May excelled in supporting teachers' growth in their practice and in leadership. When she transitioned back to the classroom, she thought at first that was the part of being a principal she would miss the most.

"Then, I thought, 'Wait a minute, I still can do that!,'" she says. "I can still lead and guide by modeling—by example—but without many of the other parts that come with being a building principal."

May teaches at Copper Basin K-8 in the Florence Unified School District. She moved with the third-grade class she taught last year into fourth grade this year, propelled by the effectiveness looping provided in her earlier years in education. She wanted to continue to build relationships with both students and parents, and to provide more efficient instruction. After talking with school administrators, she was approved to loop with those students, and she credits those continued relationships with the great growth she has seen this year amid the uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic. Teaching mostly the same students two years in a row has also pushed May to continue to try new strategies to keep things fresh, she notes.

No matter her position, though, May sees herself as a learner.

"As an educator, I've always held true to the thought, 'Although you may arrive, it's never the final destination. There's always more to see, more to do, more to experience,'" she says. "I've noticed that throughout my entire career, inquiry has been my guiding light. It's truly the reason why I'm here. I dig and keep digging until I find the best for my learning environment. I see my scholars doing the same daily. They often hear me say, 'I can't teach you everything there is to know—investigate, search, ask, go beyond these walls.'"

May put this into practice herself as she prepared to return to the classroom in 2018. While she always strived to center students and families in her work as a principal and administrator, she realized she had not actually been a classroom teacher for a decade. So she attended a variety of learning opportunities and decided to pursue National Board Certification.

"That process has made me think totally differently," she shares. The National Board Certification process has caused her to continually ask about the purpose of everything she does with students. "It's rewired my thinking and put me on the path of being able

to take off and grow. I have been able to see myself in a new light, even after so many years and myriad experiences."

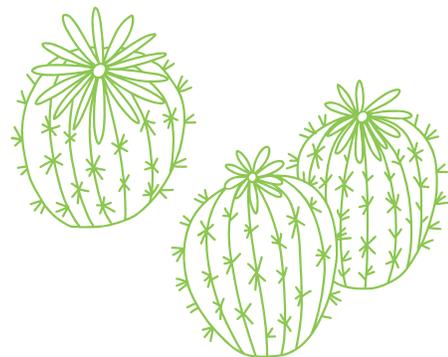
May brings her excitement for learning and her warm and enthusiastic energy to the teachers she mentors, both formally and informally. That includes her own daughter, who now teaches down the hall. Thus far, three other teachers at Copper Basin are former student teachers in May's classroom, and she plans to continue leading from the classroom for many more years.

"As a professional, I am grateful to have the opportunity to hear from former students, teachers, and leaders across the country acknowledging my impact as a teacher, principal, district administrator, and now a teacher again," May says. "I don't take it for granted; I endeavor to continue to grow, lead, and guide as I embrace inquiry and its importance in the field of education."

1. How do you see inquiry and equity present in May's practice?

2. In what ways do you support your colleagues' learning, growth, and excitement?

3. How do you intentionally seek out professional learning that inspires and advances your practice?



3Ps in a Pod

Where practice, policy, and passion meet!

Being an educator in the 21st century is indescribably complex. There's a constant pressure to meet standards and help students achieve, but there's also a need to allow learners to color outside the lines in an effort to prompt creativity. The Arizona K12 Center believes effective teaching and learning is grounded in quality teacher development and teacher leadership. To support educators along the continuum, the Center produces 3Ps in a Pod to further dissect practice, policy, and passion in the field of education. 3Ps in a Pod features guests with ideas, perspectives, and stories relevant to what educators do both in and out of the classroom. [Subscribe now to be sure you're ready for our 10th season of 3Ps in a Pod this fall!](#)

Hear more from each of this year's Teacher Leadership Institute general session facilitators by listening to their conversations on our 3Ps in a Pod podcast. Scan each speaker's QR code using a smartphone app to access each episode.



“These historical learning standards (defined within Historically Responsive Literacy) allow educators to reimagine what learning can look like and begin to offer a promising framework for students who have not traditionally seen themselves in formal learning situations.”

— Dr. Gholdy Muhammad in *Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy*



click or scan

“What we want to see is that equation of ‘student as inquirer’ plus ‘teacher as inquirer’ equals a culture of inquiry.”

— Trevor MacKenzie, 3Ps in a Pod, S9 Episode 3: Creating a Culture of Inquiry with Kass Minor and Trevor MacKenzie



click or scan

“Why are we shooting so low? Why is getting a job the best that we can do? ... It changes things but not at the level that we need systematic changes. In education, what we need to do is build entrepreneurs; we need to build researchers, scientists, inventors, policy makers, change agents, community leaders.”

— Jaime Casap, 3Ps in a Pod, S9 Episode 18: New Opportunities for Arizona Students with Jaime Casap



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Arizona TeacherSolutions® Team

In 2011, the Arizona K12 Center launched the [Arizona TeacherSolutions Team](#) in partnership with the Center for Teaching Quality. Solutions-oriented teacher leaders from across Arizona push themselves to think outside of what is and begin looking toward what could be for Arizona's students. The Arizona teacher leaders who make up Arizona's TeacherSolutions Team represent the diversity of our state and the contexts in which we all work. These teachers lead by example while seeking solutions to some of the most complex problems facing our schools.

Each year, the Arizona K12 Center's Arizona TeacherSolutions Team members engage in an inquiry goal-setting project, each developing a goal that matters to them and setting out to seek change and learning from trying to achieve their desired outcomes. In this section of the report, you will find an overview of each of the 2020–2021 members' goals, outcomes,

and next steps. We invite you to read about their work in inquiry as a way to inspire action for yourself, your community, and your students.

Interested in becoming a member of our Arizona TeacherSolutions Team?

The Arizona TeacherSolutions Team consists of teacher leaders from throughout the state. As we navigate the future of teaching and learning in Arizona, we continue to seek educators who desire to advance their leadership skills through unique opportunities.

Discover the leader inside yourself and apply to be a part of our team. Members serve for three years and new members are announced each spring.

Please visit bit.ly/TST22-23 to find the application for the 2022–2023 school year.

“The inquiry goal project was the driving force for my students’ learning all year long. With that goal in mind, I planned and facilitated meaningful conversations with students that connected our learning with their lives and experiences. The goal also gave me confidence to try new methods and strategies with my students.”

—Leah Clark, NBCT
Glendale Union High School District

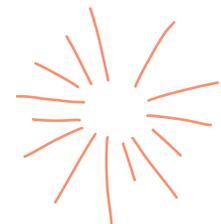


“The inquiry goal process allowed me to share strategies with teachers across my district and helped them give a voice to student behavior. The teachers are now more equipped to provide their diverse learners a safe place to learn and grow while increasing productivity time in their classrooms!”

—Erika Chapman, NBCT
Nadaburg Unified School District

“My experience on the Arizona TeacherSolutions Team has been career changing! It has helped me find my voice and has given me the chance to present about things that I wouldn’t be able to present on otherwise.”

—Kareem Neal, Phoenix Union High School District





Supporting Student Advocacy

Aminah Abdelhaq, NBCT

Middle School Science Teacher,
Mesa Public Schools

Goal

My goal for professional growth was to help students advocate for their needs through effective communication.

Why It Matters

This allows me to expand my skill set while helping my students enhance their capacity to advocate for themselves and ensure their academic and social needs are being addressed.

Activities

- Attended Arizona TeacherSolutions Team's book study of *Natural Allies* by Soo Hong
- Participated in the National Equity Project's Leading for Equity conference
- Completed of a Mindfulness Fundamentals course, and social and emotional learning professional development

Outcomes

Complex issues, such as increasing student advocacy, require comprehensive solutions with input from all stakeholders. By raising awareness among educators, administrators, and parents, we developed solutions aimed at supporting all students by leveraging the resources that exist within special education.

What's Next?

I plan to build a student advocacy coalition with my colleagues and explore strategies to engage parents—all while refining my skill set.



Addressing Systemic Inequity

Maria Barker, NBCT

Special Education Instructional Coach,
Mesa Public Schools

Goal

My goal was to focus on deepening my equity journey; expanding from addressing inequity at the personal level and shifting to addressing racial equity practices at the cultural and institutional levels, particularly in my own district and community.

Why It Matters

Systemic problems necessitate systemic solutions. In order to create more equitable opportunities for all students, we need to examine current institutional policies and practices and how biased cultural beliefs and norms reinforce inequitable institutional policies and practices.

Activities

- Deepened knowledge of equity, anti-racism, and leadership through book studies (*Onward* by Elena Aguilar, *This Book is Anti-Racist* by Tiffany Jewel, *Caste* by Isabel Wilkerson, *So You Want to Talk About Race* by Ijeoma Oluo)
- Attended webinars and conferences on equity and bias
- Facilitated anti-racism trainings with the Arizona Educational Foundation
- Contributed to district Discipline Task Force (examining current discipline practices) and district Equity Advisory Council (a partnership with city organizations and leaders)

Outcomes

Pushback from non-educators on equity work, specifically as it relates to the curriculum used with students, is often a challenge to dialogue on race and racism in educational settings. There is a significant need to build greater awareness and increase the desire for sound equity work in schools.

What's Next?

I plan to continue to research and develop training for classroom educators on how to use 'Transformative SEL' to be the bridge for community acceptance and embracement of transforming inequitable educational settings and systems and promoting justice-oriented civic engagement.



Supporting Students With Exceptional Needs

Erika Chapman, NBCT

Special Education Teacher,
Nadaburg Unified School District

Goal

My district opened its first high school this year, so my goal was to help create and implement a plan for students with exceptional needs that put supports in place that ensure access to the general education curriculum.

Why It Matters

This goal guarantees all students have access to the general education content by utilizing accommodations, modifications, and programming that meet the students where they are. It also supports general education teachers in building their toolboxes, which ultimately leads to student and teacher success!

Activities

- Met with the administrative team to advocate for student needs
- Met with high school teachers outside the district to learn how they support students with exceptional needs
- Implemented a study-skills elective
- Worked with high school teachers to support classroom needs
- Mentored students to advocate for their needs

Outcomes

Speaking up for what students need, even when you're the only one speaking, can be difficult but brings about changes that just might benefit students for years to come. Being that model of advocacy for students also shows them that great things come from hard work and to not be afraid to stand alone to make great change.

What's Next?

I will continue to work closely with the high school team to ensure that procedures are in place for students who move from the elementary school to the high school so they may get the best out of their high school experience.



Fostering Choice

Leah Clark, NBCT

High School Language Arts Teacher,
Glendale Union High School District

Goal

My goal focused on fostering opportunities for choice in order to cultivate and elevate student voice in my sophomore honors English class.

Why It Matters

Choice allows students to lean into their personal strengths, interests, skills, and prior experiences. Choice also supports relevance, ownership, and belonging in learning, thus, it increases student success.

Activities

- Reviewed course goals and outcomes
- Identified opportunities for choice
- Created lessons with choices to demonstrate learning

Outcomes

Students positively respond to choice when given the opportunity, especially in the virtual setting. My students are elated to talk about their personal choice reading selections and successfully synthesize texts of their choice both verbally and in writing.

What's Next?

Now that I better understand how much my students value choice in their learning and the impact it has on their success, I will continue to foster opportunities for choice in my classes.





Honoring Families and Culture

Gabby Chai, NBCT

Kindergarten English Language Development Teacher, Tucson Unified School District

Goal

My goal was to create an efficient and effective parental communication system honoring culture and supporting my students in reaching academic success.

Why It Matters

It is vital to connect with families and develop strong relationships to benefit my students. It is important to learn and understand family dynamics so that I can learn about my students' needs and strengths.

Activities

- Honored culture and identity as valuable resources for my classroom community, encouraging parent bilingualism because it is an asset and not a liability
- Taught parental community how to use technology, including Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and email
- Presented family engagement sessions, demonstrating what a classroom lesson includes and how to use literacy to teach reading strategies and other content areas at home

Outcomes

It is important to connect with my students' families, even more than before COVID-19, so that my students can succeed academically. Once trust is achieved and the support of the parents is present, my students become more disciplined, self-confident, and engaged in learning.

What's Next?

I would like to continue establishing stronger communities with parents, continue to advocate for my English learners, create safer learning communities, and foster high academic achievement.



Integrating Music and Technology

Susan Collins, NBCT

Elementary Music Teacher, Kingman Unified School District

Goal

My goal is to integrate technology into my general music curriculum. I am focusing on students in grades 2-5 because those are the grades that regularly use technology in their core classrooms in my setting.

Why It Matters

Students need to be guided in the use of technology in all subject areas. I want my students to know that technology can be a useful tool in traditional settings.

Activities

- Engaged in in-depth and rigorous professional development through the Arizona Technology in Education Association
- Enrolled in a cohort pursuing International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) certification, which included online and digital seminars and a capstone project showing ways that I implemented the ISTE standards

Outcomes

My students engage freely and openly with technology. Through the integration of technology, I was able to learn about my students' interests and abilities in greater depth. I am aware of new levels of engagement with my students.

What's Next?

I am continuing to learn about specific technology integrations as they relate to the general music classroom.





Addressing Racism and Ableism

Ben Collinsworth

Inclusion Preschool Teacher,
Flowing Wells Unified School District

Goal

I wanted to develop my classroom practice to be a tool and a model for equity and inclusion in my community.

Why It Matters

Racism and ableism are ongoing problems in both local and global societies. The roots of the solution to these 'isms' lie in addressing them in the early years of education through cooperative learning.

Activities

- Researched testimonies of disabled adults and their experiences as disabled children
- Mapped out noticed instances of inequity among race and ability in daily living
- Reread *Cultivating Genius* by Gholdy Muhammad

Outcomes

Many adults encountered prejudice for the first time in a public school setting. Representation in school-sanctioned media are a driving factor in their perseverance.

What's Next?

I plan to engage in more research and interviews.



Enhancing Literacy for All

Kristin Cox, NBCT

Special Education Teacher,
Dysart Unified School District

Goal

My goal was to increase literacy instruction for my students who have complex communication needs.

Why It Matters

Students with complex needs are often not taught literacy skills, or they are taught them in a fragmented way. Literacy gives all students access to the world.

Activities

- Used research-based phonics programs, even with students who can't speak with their mouths
- Studied *Comprehensive Literacy for All* by Karen Erickson and David Koppenhaver
- Followed podcasts discussing book study

Outcomes

Phonics instruction increases reading ability even for students who can't voice the sounds. All students can be taught literacy; no one is too disabled for reading instruction.

What's Next?

I plan to continue to teach using *Comprehensive Literacy for All* and model instruction for other staff in the district.





Expanding Reading Options

Erica Davis, NBCT

High School English Teacher,
Chandler Unified School District

Goal

My goal was to create a space where both independent and assigned reading would become a positive activity for my students instead of a mandated chore.

Why It Matters

In previous years, students lacked choice in reading in high school English—or felt that they couldn't relate to older novels or short pieces. I seek to create an atmosphere where students can not only feel a sense of agency in their reading choices, but actually start to enjoy reading as a pastime beyond their assigned work.

Activities

- Created reading history Flipgrid videos
- Shared my own reading choices in mini book talks
- Allowed students choice in reading independently
- Provided students with a curated list of modern works from a wide variety of authors to inspire them to read work from living writers that may be more relatable to them

Outcomes

Numerous students now come to me to talk about books they have chosen to read and for recommendations—or they ask to borrow the books I have provided my mini book talks on (when my copies become available). I have seen an increase in students having novels with them to read when there is extra time in class. I feel less frustration over the lack of reading, as in the past I often felt that students would do anything they could to avoid completing their reading assignments. There is a sense of enthusiasm for reading for pleasure.

What's Next?

I hope to find a way to fund a larger, more contemporary classroom library, and allow for choice of novels more often in class instead of all-class reads, whether in small groups or independently. And I hope to continue to read voraciously myself to provide even more recommendations for my students.



Exploring New Curriculums

Jesse Delgado

Special Education Mentor,
Tolleson Union High School District

Goal

My goal was to introduce a more equitable curriculum in my district.

Why It Matters

I feel that the curriculum that we deliver must be representative of diverse student populations. If we are serving our communities, which represent different backgrounds and experiences, then we must reflect that in our teachings.

Activities

- Shared diversity and equity conversations with educators within my space
- Read articles and books that support diverse learners
- Joined the Culturally Relevant Curriculum Committee
- Advocated for equity

Outcomes

Other educators within my space share the same ideas. Through conversations with others, a new committee has been formed.

What's Next?

I plan to create a framework for communications and provide further training for other educators.





Synthesizing the 'Why'

Randi Fielding, NBCT

Dean of Students,
Florence Unified School District

Goal

My goal was to synthesize my work in my role and align it with my 'why.'

Why It Matters

My work feels disconnected from my educational philosophy. I want my work to align with educational goals and have a positive impact.

Activities

- Read articles and books published by ASCD
- Developed a new 'why' statement
- Created a visual representation of the why, what, and how
- Attended professional development events focusing on instructional leadership

Outcomes

By identifying and intentionally practicing high-impact activities throughout my day, I can connect my 'why' to my daily practice. Rather than a compliance-driven mindset, I have developed a purposeful plan that allows me to find joy and meaning in my work.

What's Next?

As I move forward, I am systematically reflecting on my practice to refine my skills and target areas of growth.



Supporting Social-Emotional Well-Being

Jen Hudson, NBCT

Beginning Teacher Mentor,
Paradise Valley Unified School District

Goal

My goal was to learn how to better support the social-emotional learning (SEL) needs of beginning teachers.

Why It Matters

Beginning teachers this year were tasked with not only learning how to teach but learning how to teach in dual modalities in the middle of a pandemic. A normally stressful year was exacerbated by COVID-19 and, because of this, teacher SEL needs rose dramatically.

Activities

- Facilitated district-wide professional development
- Facilitated beginning-teacher professional development
- Attended multiple conferences
- Attended Arizona K12 Center's Mentor Forum

Outcomes

Through my reading, research, and interactions with teachers, it became clear that teacher SEL really came down to two questions that new induction programs need to focus on: 1) What do teachers need to be and feel safe? 2) How do we handle uncertainty?

What's Next?

I will prioritize guiding questions from findings into upcoming planning for implementation in induction for school year 2021–2022.





Supporting Students Through Adult Education

Hannah Jones, NBCT

Assistive Technology Specialist,
Madison School District

Goal

My goal was to educate caregivers about the assistive technology their students were using to access the general education curriculum.

Why It Matters

This is vital, as students have been home learning online for the majority of the 2020–2021 school year. Their caregivers have often been their primary source of support.

Activities

- Updated my website to include videos and trainings
- Met with both students AND caregivers virtually to train them
- Have remained a contact source for parents to ask questions and communicate

Outcomes

Students are much more likely to utilize their necessary assistive technology when a caregiver at home also knows how to use it. Adults also feel they have a tool with which to help their child overcome barriers.

What's Next?

When it is safe to meet in person, I will plan and conduct in-person workshops at each of the schools in our district.



Redefining Student Success

James King

High School English and Journalism Teacher,
Glendale Union High School District

Goal

I worked on opening independent pathways and redefining growth and success for diverse learners.

Why It Matters

Students' prior knowledge should not predetermine their success at any level. Students should feel successful in their personal growth even if it measures differently than their peers.

Activities

- Created differentiated assignments
- Allowed for flexible due dates
- Communicated individually about challenges

Outcomes

Allowing students to feel success with different targets and goals undoubtedly creates extra work for educators. More often than not, there are students who accomplish work quickly and feel idle while their peers take more practice time. It takes an adept focus to continue to engage students in a way that doesn't make them feel like they 'have to do more' because they found earlier work easy.

What's Next?

I plan to evaluate the curriculum for opportunities for better work that engages students beyond benchmarks.





Affirming Student Identities

Sheri Loyd, NBCT

Third-Grade Teacher,
Dysart Unified School District

Goal

My goal was to implement ways to give students the ability to bring their identity into the classroom.

Why It Matters

I want my students to see their own self-worth in their identity.

Activities

- Daily classroom meetings
- Goal setting
- Family notes

Outcomes

Daily meetings are a great way for students to share what is going on in their lives. My students feel open to share and look forward to this time. Goal setting gives students ownership of their learning. And the family note cards are such a powerful tool to bring family into the classroom. These inspiring notes are looked at daily by my students, who value the input their family has on their learning.

What's Next?

I plan to continue looking for different strategies to bring students' identities into the classroom.



Elevating Student Conversation

Christina Musselman, NBCT

First-Grade Teacher,
Lake Havasu Unified School District

Goal

My goal was to implement structures such as Kagan, accountable talk, and thinking maps in my classroom that allow students to feel safe to communicate effectively in various groups while bringing student voice to their learning and our classroom community.

Why It Matters

This is an important aspect to our classroom community this school year, more than ever, as students are still recovering from the impact of school closures. Students need to be able to voice their understanding of what they are learning and feel safe to ask questions and seek clarity.

Activities

- Attended Kagan Structures seminar
- Implemented Kagan Structures in classroom
- Trained staff on Kagan Structures and accountable talk
- Promoted student voice opportunities

Outcomes

All students seek ownership of their learning through accountable talk and intentional conversation structures. Students in first grade love to share their ideas. Being intentional with conversation structures and the use of thinking maps, student writing has elevated student voice in our classroom.

What's Next?

I would like to promote elevating student voice on our campus in all classrooms by sharing ideas with staff on how to structure student conversations in a meaningful way, without taking away from valuable learning time, but adding to it.





Focusing on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Jan Ogino, NBCT

First-Grade STEAM Teacher,
Peoria Unified School District

Goal

My goal was to implement diversity, inclusion, and equity practices both as a teacher in the classroom and in the district leadership arena using my role on the district diversity, equity, and inclusion committee.

Why It Matters

As a teacher of color, I need to model inclusion and equity practices for my students. In my role as a committee leader, I help district leaders be more aware of their biases because they work in all departments, and their leadership impacts students of color, LGBTQ students, and those with special needs.

Activities

- Engaged in self-education
- Leveraged past leadership experiences to continue to lead
- Helped write curriculum with a diversity, equity, and inclusion lens

Outcomes

There are some in education leadership that aren't ready to accept—or have the will to learn about—the need for diversity, equity, and inclusion in our districts. However, there are some who are willing to have very difficult discussions about very difficult topics like racism, white privilege, and fear of political intrusion and pressure in order to move our district into the future for our students.

What's Next?

I plan to begin the new school year with positive action like a meaningful professional learning event on diversity, equity, and inclusion.



Rethinking Math Spaces

Justin Powell

Middle School Math Teacher,
Sunnyside Unified School District

Goal

My goal was to create structures that reduce the effects of bias and hierarchy surrounding mathematics in the classroom.

Why It Matters

Status pervades all aspects of our classrooms. So many students have trouble engaging in the learning due to status issues.

Activities

- Attended a workshop by Jo Boaler, author and professor focused on equity and reform in math classrooms
- Learned about the latest research relating to complex instruction (grouping designed to reduce status and hierarchy)
- Read *Smarter Together! Collaboration and Equity in Elementary Math Classroom* by Helen Featherstone

Outcomes

It is important to address bias and hierarchy issues before students can fully engage with mathematics. There are specific strategies that we can use with our students that reduce the effects of bias and hierarchy in the math class.

What's Next?

I plan to learn about and implement new strategies to reduce effects of bias and hierarchy.





Building Relationships Through Shared Language

Eriann Roberts

Fifth-Grade Teacher,
Chandler Unified School District

Goal

My goal is to build my family engagement by improving on my Spanish-speaking skills.

Why It Matters

This year has really shown how important it is to partner with parents to support students and their learning. With 9/10 of my parents only speaking Spanish, it has been challenging to build relationships with them while relying on translators for every point of verbal contact. I want to be able to communicate with them on my own.

Activities

- Took at-home Spanish lessons
- Partnered with my Spanish-speaking coworker to increase my academic language in Spanish and work on conversation skills
- Worked to use both English and Spanish comfortably with my students

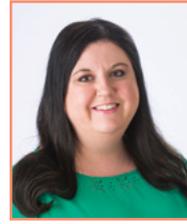
Outcomes

My students' parents are very appreciative of the effort I am making to build relationships with them. I have been able to understand the struggles of my English learners so much better as I, myself, have been trying to learn a new language. Being open about my learning process with my students and allowing them to help me learn has really given them confidence in their own learning and teaching journeys.

What's Next?

While I have made progress, there is still a long way to go. Learning a new language has proven very challenging, but I will continue to work at it because I know how important it is to myself as well as my students.

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Reaching ALL Students

Kristin Roberts, NBCT

Ninth-Grade English Teacher,
Phoenix Union High School District

Goal

My goal was to increase equity in my classroom by leaning into who my students are as individuals, appreciating the knowledge and skills they bring to the classroom, and designing instruction that was relevant and motivating.

Why It Matters

So many of our teaching practices reach MOST of our students, not all of them. However, all students come to the classroom with unique identities, strengths, and skills.

Activities

- Read *We Got This*. by Cornelius Minor
- Developed regular whole-class and individual check-ins to learn more about my students
- Invited students to reflect on what resonated with them as learners

Outcomes

The questions I ask myself when planning lessons have deepened and grown, and I realize that this work will take a lot of time. Now I find that my students recognize my imperfect efforts; they express appreciation and have developed a stronger sense of trust in me.

What's Next?

I plan to increase my collaboration with students' families and with other teachers to continue getting to know my students in more meaningful ways and to develop projects and assignments that help students meaningfully apply the content of my course to their lives right now, not just for their future goals.





Constructing Identity-Safe Spaces

Jennifer Sumida, NBCT

Third-Grade Teacher,
ASU Preparatory Academy

Goal

My goal was to create an identity-safe classroom by implementing different practices to ensure success for all learners.

Why It Matters

Creating identity-safe classrooms during three modes of learning (in-person, hybrid, and virtual) is key in making sure all my learners feel loved, valued, and a sense of belonging to our classroom.

Activities

- Established weekly class meetings to learn about growth mindset and the *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* by Sean Covey
- Created SMART goals throughout the school year with my students
- Class adopted the motto 'Mistakes are proof that we are still learning'
- Made personal connections with my students throughout the learning process

Outcomes

Creating an identity-safe classroom is a process, as is embracing the opportunity to transform teacher mistakes into learning experiences for students.

What's Next?

I would like to learn new identity-safe practices to incorporate into my classroom.



Empowering Students and Building Critical Thinking

Holli Taylor, NBCT

Middle School ELA Teacher and Mentor,
Nadaburg Unified School District

Goal

My goal was to empower the individual voices in my room to seek to understand others. I achieved this by creating a space that was conducive and adaptive to student needs and pushed the criticality of student boundaries to allow each to find their greatness.

Why It Matters

Teaching sixth grade in this moment is shaped by who I am and who I want to be for adolescent learning. It matters to me to support students in discovery of their beliefs and how they have the power to curate their own story.

Activities

- Held center-of-control meetings, balancing power to raise all voices in a space to think critically to solve issues in a strengths/repair process
- Developed a literary society in the classroom that addresses self-bias by building awareness of others
- Cultivated what leadership looks like in each one of us through mentorship
- Used guided questions to facilitate in student driven movements gaining momentum for change

Outcomes

Allowing for critical conversations gives students a voice and platform for change and inspires them to support others inside and outside of their own classroom. They have developed a global perspective and see where they fit in an ever-changing world, and where they can speak up to make changes.

What's Next?

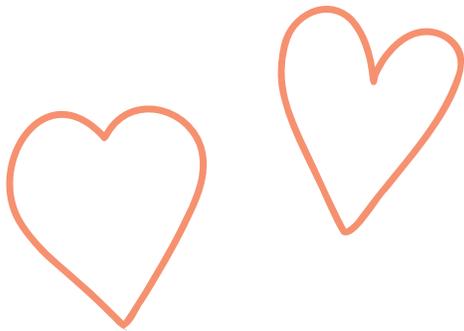
I plan to continue to support students' development of global perspectives through literary societies that recognize boundaries and choose actions based on what they believe needs to happen next.



Acknowledgments

Thank you to this year's teacher leaders who allowed us to share their stories and expertise and to their colleagues, schools, and districts for welcoming us into their spaces. The teacher leaders included here not only planned and shared with us about their work and inquiry journeys but did so during an especially challenging time.

We hope these teachers' accounts of passion, courage, selflessness, and resilience inspire teachers across the continuum to take positive action to enhance their education communities. We dedicate this publication to all of Arizona's educators. As teacher leaders, we salute your willingness to seek ways to make education more equitable and inclusive for your students, colleagues, and for the betterment of your communities. You are cultivating a spirit of hope for the future of Arizona and our nation. The energy you exert and time you dedicate to better our state's education system is priceless.





**When teachers learn,
kids learn;
when teachers lead,
kids lead; and
when teachers are inspired,
kids are inspired.**

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