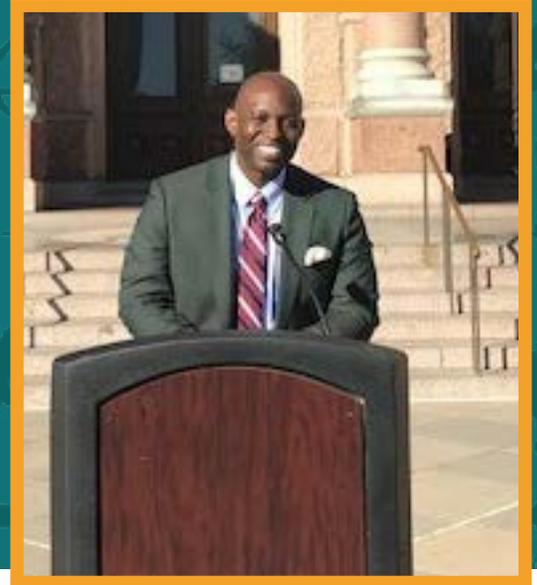


ERIC HALE & KEISHA REMBERT

LEVERAGING PRACTICE TO LEAD POLICY



Eric Hale and Keisha Rembert both started the 2018-19 school year expecting to spend their days teaching as they had in years past. But both ended the year in a vastly different place after completing a fellowship program that opened up new opportunities to influence and advance both local and state education policy.

For Rembert this meant ultimately leading a district-wide affinity group for teachers of color; for Hale this meant speaking for more than 30 minutes with members of the Texas Senate Education Committee. For both of them participation in the [Teach Plus Teaching Policy Fellowship Program](#) offered an opportunity to build new skills and grow their potential for impact from instructional expert to policy leader – all while continuing to teach.

“I was looking for ways to grow and evolve and learn,” Rembert said. “[The policy fellowship] reinvigorated both my teaching and learning, and allowed me to effect change in a different way. In my school I could impact things locally, and with my colleagues. Now this work is statewide, and elevating the whole profession.”

Rembert and Hale are just two of the more than 350

teachers around the country who have participated in the Policy Fellowship led by [Teach Plus](#), a policy and advocacy organization that believes fiercely in the power of teachers. Teach Plus works in states across the country to support teachers as they hone their instructional craft, raise their voice in public forums, and advocate for their profession and the students they serve with authenticity and purpose. The Policy Fellowship is a selective program that accepts only current classroom teachers who have at least two years of classroom experience, support from their principal, and a track record of success with student outcomes.

The Fellowship provides a space for workgroups to identify areas to impact, coaching and tools to elevate their voices, and access to educational leaders across the country. Teach Plus provides guidance on advocacy tools that include writing op-eds, speaking with lawmakers and gaining access to earned media, but the teachers participating in the fellowship drive content, shape the approach and lead the interactions with lawmakers, district leaders and the media.

Josh Kaufmann, Executive Director of Teach Plus Illinois, describes the work as akin to speaking a new language.



ERIC HALE'S PATHWAY TO TEACHER LEADERSHIP

- BS in Organizational Leadership from Wright State University
- Elementary teaching certification from Texas Teachers
- Taught at Richardson ISD for One Year and Dallas ISD for Nine Years
- Serves on Dallas ISD's committee for the Next Generation Teacher Evaluation Project
- Serves as a Distinguished Teacher Ambassador for the Thomas Jefferson Feeder Pattern
- 2018 Dallas Fort Worth Teach Plus Policy Fellow

TEACH PLUS

BY THE NUMBERS 2018

8,686 educator advocacy actions



1,468

educators signed on to letters to elected officials



351

fellows in 10 regions

14,995

participants in policy and practice programs

222 meetings with policymakers across Teach Plus regions

139 Op-Eds

17 reports and policy briefs

“We are building bilingual teachers,” he said. “They come to the Fellowship already knowing the language of pedagogy, but with us they learn the language of policy.”

For [Rembert](#) this meant accessing a platform for her to address the challenge of teacher equity and diversity at a time when Illinois districts were struggling to retain educators, especially teachers of color. She knew firsthand the educational challenges facing students from poor communities, and after more than 15 years in the classroom in Illinois, she also knew what it felt like to be a teacher of color in a school with a predominantly white population.

“I had to bring all cultures into the classroom, and I was doing that alone,” she said. “My colleagues often did not incorporate other voices in their classrooms. I understood how my students could benefit from having more teacher of color in their buildings, and how my work could benefit them.”

After completing the Fellowship Rembert co-authored [Equity and Diversity by Design: Recommendations on Recruiting and Retaining Teachers of Color in Illinois](#), which illustrated and described solutions for increasing the diversity of classroom teachers. When Rembert shared this report with district leaders they took the recommendations seriously, and invited her to both share her findings statewide and to lead an affinity group for teachers of color in Indian Prairie.

This became a springboard for real change, she said. In the summer of 2019 Rembert and two other teachers presented their findings to executive directors of the Illinois Principals Association (IPA) and the Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB). Interest in this work remains high, and they have been invited to speak at an IPA Board Meeting, share their work with IPA Principals, and contribute an article to the IASB bimonthly magazine.

Similarly, [Hale](#) used his Fellowship experience to influence legislative recommendations as they were being made. During his early years as an elementary school teacher he committed to becoming the teacher who could see the light in students impacted by trauma and poverty and help lift them up instead of writing them off. As he began his instructional

POLICY FELLOWSHIP STRUCTURE

- 20-30 Fellows selected statewide
- Applicants can be nominated by a principal or peer, or apply directly to the program
- Monthly professional development (both in-person and virtual)
- Annual stipend of \$1600



AURORA

KEISHA REMBERT'S PATHWAY TO TEACHER LEADERSHIP

- BA in English from Boston College
- MA in Elementary Education from Chicago State University
- Taught at Matteson School District for Three Years and Indian Prairie School District for Fourteen Years
- Serves on Indian Prairie's Curriculum Writing Committee
- Member of the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center Educator Advisory Council
- Member of National Council of Teachers of English's Committee Against Racism and Bias
- 2018 Teach Plus Policy Fellow

For more information,
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career, he developed fundraising skills to bring in resources to provide needed support for his students, including meals and uniforms. He also took on leadership opportunities within Dallas ISD, and as a Dallas Distinguished Teacher became an instrumental voice for competitive compensation for classroom teachers, a program which awards increased compensation to those who demonstrate leadership and advanced student performance.

As a Teach Plus Policy Fellow Hale was able to speak directly to lawmakers as they considered House Bill 3, a sweeping school finance bill that included \$6.5 billion in new public education spending. He used his own experience in Dallas to make this case, and passionately spoke about the impact that earning a competitive wage had on his work, life and instructional practice. The Policy Fellowship provided Hale the vehicle and the coaching necessary to share his message about retention, compensation and student achievement in a way that few teachers have before. House Bill 3 ultimately received bipartisan support, and was considered a win for classroom teachers across the state.

Hale credits his recent success to both the program and his new network of peers. "Teach Plus ... connected me with other educators I had respected from afar," he said. "Now we have built great relationships, and we learn from one another. Iron sharpens iron."

Prior to 2018 both Rembert and Hale were ready to more broadly impact the teaching profession, and the Policy Fellowship made that possible. By employing the the skills and supports they received as policy fellows, these two classroom teachers have significantly expanded the reach of their impact from instructional expert to policy leader.

These teacher leaders have never met, teach different grade levels, and have had different paths to the classroom and policy work. But their message to aspiring policy leaders is the same. Says Rembert, "Don't be afraid of forging your own path. Utilize your power."

Hale agreed. "Be authentic," he said. "Spend time learning your teacher voice, because there is no one size fits all. Great educators come in all different ways."

