

# Stories of Change from New York City's Teacher Incentive Fund

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## **The Teacher Incentive Fund**

In 2013-14, the NYC Department of Education launched the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF). In 78 middle schools across New York City, teachers took on the roles of Peer Instructional Coaches (PICs) and Demonstration Teachers (DTs). More important than these new titles for teacher leadership, though, was a biweekly set of experiences and assignments that every PIC and DT engaged in over the course of the year. They did this through close work with their Teacher Team Leaders (TTLs), former teachers who each supported a portfolio of eight TIF schools, visiting with their PICs and DTs at each school once every two weeks. Over the year, PICs and DTs gained new experiences in leadership. In schools where there was already a solid base of support that enabled the work to progress more rapidly, they also helped colleagues to experience their own changes.

The five vignettes below relate the experiences of individual PICs, DTs, and teachers and the ways they changed over the course of the 2013-14 year. These were compiled through a series of reflective discussions facilitated by Eskolta School Research and Design through the TIF program between February and June 2014. Discussions were conducted on-site at six middle schools that had been identified by Teacher Team Leaders to help the teams continue to learn from the change that can occur through the TIF program.

## Building the Team

Denise Gibaldi knows a lot about the inner workings of I.S. 234, a middle school in Sheepshead Bay led by Principal Susan Schaeffer. Not only is she a thirteen-year veteran of the school, she also grew up in the neighborhood and attended the school as a student. After over a decade teaching at 234, Denise was reasonably content to stay inside her classroom and keep to herself. A fairly large school with nearly 2000 students and predominantly veteran staff, 234 maintained a culture of closed-door teaching. That was how things had always been at 234 and, in Denise's words, "there are people I have worked with for over ten years here and I have never had a conversation with them."

Though many on staff seemed content with the status quo, something in Denise perked up at the talk of TIF work last year. Perhaps it was her intimate knowledge of the school; or her years of experience; or perhaps it was because it had become commonplace among teachers at 234 to work independently; Denise decided to apply to become a Demonstration Teacher (DT), opening up her classroom in ways that were new to her. In fact, after being appointed to the position, she embarked on a journey at the school that she did not entirely expect.

When she took on the role of DT, Denise had to begin spending time with the rest of her team of DT's and PIC's. At first, this struck her as neither a chore nor a benefit but simply part of the package she had signed up for. Then, she found, her feelings on this began to change. One of the early assignments every PIC and DT had to engage in asked him or her to reflect on their own role as leaders. A later assignment asked them to visit one another's classrooms and discuss low-inference notes. Within the framework of the TIF modules, a sense of safety and trust was created that gave Denise a new lens through which to view her work.

These and other experiences opened up conversations on her small team that Denise had never had with her colleagues before. What began simply as assignments to complete soon became, in Denise's words, "eye opening changes in how we view ourselves and each other." As Denise reflects on the experience, she now speaks with pride of how "we have honest discussions about our practices, what works, and what doesn't work." For Denise, her previous idea that she simply would not judge others' work changed into one of working with a team in which you intentionally engage in non-judgmental conversations and thereby learn from one another's direct observations and reflections. "Sometimes we call our meetings a love-fest," Denise says, "but it is a love that is emerging around the work, around the students, and around a new purpose we are finding for ourselves as professionals."

"We call ourselves The Team," she explains, the capital Ts implicit in her description, and as The Team gelled, its success became infectious. In a school of veteran teachers who are already comfortable with their own capacity, teachers were reluctant to reach out at first. But by the winter, The Team was becoming more visible in the school. "Seeing us work together and hearing about our work is helping to change that," according to Denise. She explains, "At first, people looked at it as someone's coming in to judge me rather than observe me, based on a whole culture of an administrator coming in to judge me,

but we have been able to stress that we're teachers too, we're not on an administrative staff, and we are learning from each other."

In previous years, through other initiatives, the practice of looking at student work had been introduced as a promising strategy for teachers to improve instruction. Denise, however, had never seen the value in it. "In previous years when we've talked about looking at student work, I looked at it as a chore," Denise says, "I didn't look at it as something that would help me formulate my lessons." That belief began to erode as she and a fellow PIC began using a TIF protocol for looking at student work with Denise's class.

Immediately, working together on the project, Denise and her colleague identified a key gap in student learning and performance: citing evidence. Armed with that, they set about designing a classroom tool to address the issue. Together they created the Evidence, Explain, Connect (EEC) template for students, then implemented it in Denise's class and began tracking results. Within a week they saw drastic improvements. In sharing and further refining the tool with other members of the TIF team, they soon found others interested in adopting the tool. As a part of her work in scaffolding with students, Denise sees it as a success. "Our goal," Denise says, "was to be able to get the students to do what the template said without the template. We had a 90 percent success rate and saw real improvement."

The EEC template they created based on their TIF work has been a powerful tool in Denise's demonstration class. As Denise explains, "I started doing a "lunch and learn" and had worksheets for people—talked about the EEC and some other things. Even colleagues who couldn't come to the lunch and learn benefited because a few came after the fact and asked for extra copies." It has turned into a leverage point in engaging other teachers outside of the TIF team. As other teachers heard about the work in Denise's class, she was more emboldened to share. "I constantly say that it's grassroots. The first people who will start using it will be The Team, then our friends, and then they'll talk about it with other people," Denise says.

By June, Denise was looking not only at her colleagues but also at her own practice in a markedly different way than she had at the start of the year. "Now I've come to value the process and want to look at my student work. I think about, what do I want to accomplish? How can I best get there? Where are my students at and how do I know that?" That change in beliefs, both regarding school culture and classroom practice, has helped Denise finally explain, both to her and others, just why she applied to be a Demonstration Teacher in the first place. "I finally figured out that this is all part of why I wanted to be a DT. I wanted to have that feeling of being a colleague, that our work is important, and that we're in this together," Denise says. "This program says that there's no such thing as a perfect teacher. You are a lifetime learner. I believe that now. The whole team does and we are spreading that message."

## **Building the Confidence to Lead**

After five years of teaching at Bronx Writing Academy, a school of just under 500 students in the South Bronx, Ms. Cassidy-Blum feels like she knows a lot about instruction. Ms. CB knows her students, she knows the expectations that are on her and her fellow middle-school teachers, and she knows what she has to do each day in the classroom. Her decision to apply for the PIC position with the TIF program was welcomed by her principal, Mr. Samuels, and the opportunity seemed like a natural progression in Ms. CB's career. The transition from teacher to teacher leader, however, was not without challenges.

Ms. CB has always been an educator hungry for more work to do. Engaging in the TIF work as a PIC appealed to her as a way to have greater impact on the students in her school through working with her colleagues. In addition to the PIC position, she is also in her first year as department co-chair and is in effect the key point person for her sixth-grade team. As a young teacher, despite her hunger to do more and more for the students and the school, this year has been challenging. Though willing to step into these new roles, she at first faced difficulty in becoming a leader of adult learning. As Ms. CB says, "For me it's been new to view myself as a leader of adults. Everyone has different things they bring to the table based on their experience." Some of this trepidation is based on the varied years of experience in the school. As she stated, "I don't like to approach a group that's older than I am, so owning my role has been new to me. Stepping into my role as department head, I have sometimes felt like I don't deserve to be leading the department."

While stepping into any leadership position can be challenging, Ms. CB felt this struggle acutely at the beginning of the year. Upon reflection, Ms. CB was able to pinpoint a key mistake she made early on in the program. The introduction of both the program and her role had not been rolled out in a particularly formal manner in the beginning of the school year. Perhaps because of her insecurity, Ms. CB downplayed her role at the start of the year and failed to make strong connections with colleagues around the potential of the work. "In initially introducing myself," she says, "I should have taken it more seriously. If I had only been more earnest and owned the role, we could have started differently. I should have practiced it and really shown I believe in it."

While Ms. CB struggled to establish her clout as a leader, both to herself and to her colleagues, there was one person at BWA who especially supported her. Principal Samuels saw the struggles Ms. CB was having, and the potential within her to succeed, and he intervened. In meeting and strategizing with Ms. CB around the work and her new roles, Mr. Samuels quickly identified an area of need: department meetings. He began collaborating with her on both planning and facilitating department meetings.

Having the opportunity to plan with the principal, to co-facilitate and, even more importantly, to be seen by staff co-facilitating with the principal, were instrumental in Ms. CB's shift. According to Ms. CB, "It's been important for me to have the support of Mr. Samuels openly." The meetings helped establish Ms. CB's credibility quickly, and pushed her to new levels of interaction with veteran teachers. Their collaboration varied, as Ms. CB says, "sometimes him leading things, sometimes him writing an email and then me leading things, sometimes me leading things but saying that we're all being held accountable to

him; and then after having set it up that way so that that's kind of the expectation, then it's been an easier transition for me to ask people to produce things.”

While Ms. CB’s confidence in herself and her role began to rise through the support of her principal, she also found other support for her TIF work with teachers. In her TIF training, the protocols and tools began to create both the framework and the opportunity to engage with other teachers in a different way, taking the personality and age factor out of the equation. According to Ms. CB, “The tools altogether made me feel more like I knew what I was doing. That in turn made me more likely to say, ‘let's do this or that,’ with more confidence.” Especially helpful, according to Ms. CB, were tools that provided concrete data and starting points for discussing data as well as protocols for having difficult conversations around the work. “I felt like I just had a clear picture,” Ms. CB says, “of what was going on in my classroom and in my colleagues' classrooms and was able to support that clear picture with evidence.”

Initially, in establishing herself, Ms. CB worked closely with Mr. Samuels to reach out to teachers together. However, the day eventually came when she had the first difficult conversation on her own. As she recalls, “I had to speak to a teacher, and I mentioned it to Mr. Samuels but he was busy and then didn't have time to come with me. That made me angry. Then I said, ‘Fine, I'm on my own. I'll deal with it by myself.’” Those first strides toward independence began to make a difference for Ms. CB. She discovered that over the course of the year, she had changed. She had developed the capacity to engage on her own. “The TIF training made me feel like I had the tools necessary to have [the conversation], and I did,” Ms. CB says, “then later I told the principal what had happened, and he said it was probably better that I dealt with it without him.”

While Ms. CB’s skills and confidence have grown markedly since the beginning of the year, she knows there is more work to be done. Through TIF self-reflection Ms. CB is continually learning about herself as a teacher leader and learning from the missteps that she may have taken. Moving toward independence from Mr. Samuels has been a transition, but one that was important to Ms. CB’s growth. In her conversations with teachers, she has realized that she is making inroads. As she says, “I’ve discovered that people trust me when I’m talking to them one on one. But talking in front of groups? I am working on it, but I’m still not as used to that.” She adds, “Although now I might feel more comfortable if I try to approach five colleagues I’ve never talked to before and ask to collaborate with them on some small thing.” It all goes back to her learning about herself as a leader. According to Ms. CB, “If I had stepped earlier into the role of the leader and then started sending the message to people, reaching out and really getting to as many corners of the school community as possible earlier in the year, it would have disseminated the message faster and helped us all speak in a common language faster.”

## Leading by Listening

At Accion Academy, a small school in the East Tremont section of the Bronx led by Principal Nikole Booker, Mr. Deon Burgher comes across as an educator confident in his abilities and experience. Having taught social studies for six years, and currently acting as school data specialist and mentor to two new teacher mentees, Mr. Burgher did not often ask for help. With his wealth of experience and expertise, Burgher was able to handle most situations he faced and considered himself a problem solver. This strength and self-confidence helped him in being chosen as a Demonstration Teacher at Accion, but he soon found out that the skills and perspective that help one be a strong and independent classroom teacher are not necessarily the same ones that prepare you to support colleagues.

Mr. Burgher had always seen leaders as authority figures sitting high upon a perch and dictating what to do. “In the past, I had a certain lens or viewpoint of what a leader should be—that a leader was always standing on high and delegating and things like that,” he explains, highlighting that this was not how he wanted to interact with peers. But Mr. Burgher nonetheless needed to find his own voice and his own definition of teacher leadership if he was going to support colleagues. Through the support of Principal Booker and his work with the TIF program, Burgher began his own journey.

As a DT and member of the TIF team, Burgher began the year excited about working with other staff members and helping them grow. In Accion Academy, a small school, the PICs and DTs had multiple leadership responsibilities. As the year began, the entire TIF team began to use the tools and skills from TIF with the existing Accion mentor program. For Mr. Burgher, it was a good use of resources in a small school. For example, in one conversation with a mentee early in the year, Mr. Burgher brought up challenges he had seen the teacher struggling with in relation to classroom management. The solutions were clear to Mr. Burgher and he was explaining them—basic rules and routines he could put in place, ways he could establish norms with students. After he had offered a series of ideas, Mr. Burgher looked up and suddenly stopped in silence. “I realized from his face and his frustration,” Mr. Burgher recalls, “that he was listening and he was being respectful of me and of the position, but I remember that face from when I was a mentee—and that was the face of, ‘I’ve tried that and it’s not going to work with these kids.’ With that, I stopped talking.” Mr. Burgher refocused the conversation, asking more questions and allowing space for his mentee to talk and process his own experience and perspective.

This led Burgher to think differently about his own work. In working with his TIF Teacher Team Leader (TTL), he was able to reflect on this approach more deeply. “That was a very important experience for me because often times when you come to table as a problem-solver for someone else, I’m looking at it with my point of view and my experiences, from my skill set and my limitations.” Burgher came to realize that listening was a skill that a leader could develop and employ in the same way he had originally thought of the importance of a leader having problem-solving skills.

That experience with his mentee and Mr. Burgher’s subsequent work with his TTL led to another discovery for the problem-solving, confident DT: the power of vulnerability. As Burgher says, he found greater success with mentees “in showing myself as being vulnerable, as being a teacher. Even though I



have a certain amount of experiences and a certain understanding, of how things run, at the same time I make mistakes and have some of the same struggles that younger teachers have—not only that, there are things I can learn and use from the mentees.” The work with his TIF team members, his TTL, and the TIF protocols on self-reflection were causing changes in Burgher’s practice and thinking that were unexpected. “In terms of the most important ways I’ve changed, it has been being a listener. I had no idea what a great skill being a listener was and oftentimes when I engaged in conversations or I was listening to someone, it was always listening with a thought in mind. Either to respond or find an answer or think of a situation instead of truly listening to what the other person was really saying. [My TTL] especially helped me see that by teaching me about listening without problem-solving immediately.”

Burgher’s ideas about leadership, experience, and problem solving have undergone changes over the course of this year. More than anything else, the work has led to a renewed determination on his part to reach all kids, “I want to be able to be a little bit more vulnerable with the students. Students know a lot also. Oftentimes, we don’t find out what they know or the extent of what the students know. And that’s because of the belief that the teacher, or the mentor, knows everything. I made the same mistakes with my mentees that I have been making for years with my students. Now, through listening and showing that vulnerability—the same thing that I’ve been doing with the mentees—want to do that with the students.”

As the year ended, Mr. Burgher saw himself as a leader in his own way. “The TIF work has allowed me to do is to find my voice in terms of someone who can lead from within the group, which,” he highlights, “is where I really want to be.”

## A Veteran Teacher Learns from her Colleagues

*Names in this story have been changed to protect the privacy of those involved.*

In a large school with a large number of veteran teachers, Karen Griffin stood out. Unfortunately, Karen did not necessarily stand out for the right reasons. With 25 years of experience in the classroom, thirteen at Oatendale Middle School and twelve in other schools, Karen was in the all-too-common position of being thought of as “too experienced” to change her practice. She was not particularly close with colleagues and saw little reason to engage with them around classroom practice or planning, except when mandated. Little thought was initially given to her possible journey with TIF, primarily because, in the words of the principal, administration thought Karen “did what she did, and that was it.”

Karen showed up punctually, attended to her duties, fulfilled contractual obligations, and had her lessons ready each day. The quality of those lessons was not considered high by the administration, but in a large school consumed with the daily drama of most middle schools, there did not seem much to do although there had been attempts over the years. In Karen’s words, “When I started here, it was textbooks every day, and grammar and spelling once a week each.” Having been in the school as long as she had, Karen was, to a degree, jaded regarding her work. “There have been a lot of changes through the years in this school and in the DOE in general; a lot of changes here at the classroom level as far as curriculum, and what and how we teach,” Karen says, “I have seen a lot of programs come and go. Some programs came in here, and I know they cost the school a lot of money. The people were nice, but I never really got anything out of the program. Some outside folks came in and gave PD and it was real torture.”

Early in the spring semester of 2014, at a meeting with her assistant principal following her last observation, it was suggested that Karen talk to some members of the TIF team at Oatendale. For someone who was relatively shy and protective around colleagues, this was a challenge. “I value my privacy and don’t like to talk around people, and I just didn’t want to do it.” Thinking back on the experience, though, Karen reflects, “I was like a kid who is told to do something and puts up a barrier.” Reluctantly, Karen reached out. Having been introduced to the TIF members at a staff meeting early in the year, she had an idea who she wanted to connect with. Linda Owens, a thirteen-year veteran and a PIC, was someone Karen had known through the years. “We had worked together a little, but were on different grade levels so never really got to do much.”

Working with as experienced a teacher as Karen, someone who is perceived as being set in certain beliefs and actions, could have been a daunting challenge for a PIC. Linda felt confident in how to approach it. “I believe we hear things about some colleagues in schools and jump to conclusions,” Linda says, “but we can’t judge people. That isn’t helpful. When those judgments are out there, people know it and they shut down and there is a fear to open up.” This understanding, gleaned from conversations and materials she had had through her TIF work earlier in the year, influenced how Linda chose to interact with Karen: explicitly as a peer.

From their first meeting, Linda set a positive tone. As Linda says, “I went in and gave her some space and didn’t push anything right away. We talked, found some similarities and common interests, and began building some trust. Then we started on the work.” The two began with some basics. “Mostly she has been helping me with lesson plans,” Karen says, “and now we’re planning and she is helping me with Code X.” Linda told Karen, “I am a peer, a fellow teacher, not an administrator or a judge. My job is to listen, to be here for you, and to help.”

For Karen, the sense of trust and safety that Linda helped create was important to begin the process of change. After the first couple of meetings, Karen visited Linda’s classroom and they debriefed together. By that time, Karen explains, “I felt very comfortable with her and didn’t mind the whole process. I began regularly sharing my lesson plans as drafts and getting her feedback. It helps. Linda knows me now, she knows what I do and I feel like I can trust her. We meet once a week on our shared period. Now we call and email to check on the work several times a week. It is really enhancing what I am doing in the classroom.”

While the real relationship between Karen and Linda only began in May, it has taken root. “I met with the principal to talk about the work we’ve been doing,” Karen reported, “and I told her I want to continue working with Linda next year. I know I don’t have to and it is not mandated, but I trust her and it helps. If this program didn’t exist, I don’t think I would have the time, space, or opportunity to work with other colleagues. I don’t even know if they would be willing. I definitely want to continue this next year.”

Linda also noted that the relationship and work had been a helpful process. “I always remember that I’m a peer, that I need to treat people with dignity, using different types of protocols and approaches modeled by our TTL, and use all that in my work and coaching.” In addition, Linda sees her work with Karen as a barometer of the overall opportunities for change both in her school and in the city. “Folks knew I was working with Karen, and I could tell they thought it was not going to change anything about her practice,” Linda says, “but her practice has changed based on the feedback and our work together. The impossible happened. That is what this work—this coaching—is all about.”

## A Teacher Team Learns to Work Together

*Names in this story have been changed to protect the privacy of those involved.*

In any co-teaching situation, there is a need for mutual respect, collaboration, and communication. In the co-teaching partnership between Ms. Albert and Ms. Richards, these were difficult to achieve.

The two had been paired together at Wheatley Park Middle School (WP), a small school in West Brooklyn, at the beginning of the 2013-14 school year. They were at different points in their careers and experiences. Ms. Richards was in her third year of teaching and her first year at WP. As she remembers, “My last school was very, very different, and this was my first year co-teaching. I'm used to planning in a different way, which really wasn't working for Ms. Albert. I just didn't really have the tools necessary to do this.” Ms. Albert, who had started her teaching career at WP midway through the previous year, was eager to do all she could. As Ms. Albert recalls, “The basic issue was my co-teacher and I struggled to communicate effectively in terms of planning lessons; there was a lot of miscommunication and tasks not being completed. We couldn't find a way to communicate effectively with each other without being unprofessional.” The friction was tangible.

“Ms. Albert was very organized,” recalls Ms. Turner, another teacher at WP. “She had everything figured out for three months, and so when she sat down in a planning meeting with her co-teacher, they had a lot to look at, and the other teacher could see everything that was going to happen, and if something needed to be revised, then, it was with enough time that that could happen. So she's just more thorough. And the other teacher, Ms. Richards, just wasn't doing that. She was like: morning of, here's what we're doing today. She just wasn't as organized.” The conflict that arose and the frustrations associated with it had caused a complete breakdown in communication.

Ms. Turner was particularly familiar with the co-teachers because the responsibility of helping them solve their struggle for the benefit of the students fell to her. Ms. Turner was a five-year veteran at WP and head of the ELA Department. Shared leadership is a value at the core of the culture at WP, and Ms. Turner had taken on the mantle of shared leadership with zeal. With the emergence of the TIF opportunity, Ms. Turner had become the school's PIC and joined a team with two others who were accustomed to working together for the school. “We [the PICs and DT] were ready; we were primed for the work this year. And all three of us were heading our department and had been for a couple of years because we have that model.”

From the start, Ms. Turner demonstrated an understanding of the difference between working with children and working with adults. As she says, “Kids need to know that their own choice and agency is tapped into. They need to be seen as an individual. But an adult needs you to validate and respect everything that they're bringing to the table. And that has to be acknowledged from the beginning of the conversation.” That understanding served Ms. Turner well in her initial work with teachers and team members in her school. In her inter-visitations with team members and in modeling pieces of work for

other teachers, things went well. Her true challenge came soon after, though, in working with Ms. Albert and Ms. Richards.

In Cycle 10 of the TIF work, the team had been given an assignment. “The question was ‘What’s the conversation or what’s the problem you’re avoiding right now in your professional duties?’” Ms. Turner recalls. “Let’s face it—we all are avoiding something. So I thought about it. What’s the one thing I know is a problem that I just can’t bring myself to deal with because I don’t really have the tools for it? And this is what I thought of. I thought about these two co-teachers who don’t communicate, and it’s not working in their class.”

Having worked through *Renewing School: Productive Dialogue and Difficult Conversations* from Cycle 10, Ms. Turner felt better prepared to intervene. As she recalls, “What I needed was for both of them to go through the process of reflection that had me as a facilitator who wasn’t judging them. And so my personal feelings about it like, ‘You’re not doing your job,’ had to be removed, which is another thing I really had to learn this year about working with adults.” The lesson was embedded deeply in Ms. Turner’s practice now. “You have to remove your level of judgment and instead just be observant,” Ms. Turner says, “you have to be observant, and you have to be solution-oriented, and you have to be supportive in every possible way, especially because it can be so hard to reserve judgment.”

When the day came for the difficult conversation, Ms. Turner tweaked the protocol, and dove right in with the pair. At first, both Ms. Albert and Ms. Richards were not ready to talk. In utilizing the protocol, however, both teachers, as well as Ms. Turner, began to open up. As Ms. Turner says, “There were moments where it got emotional, but because we had the protocol, I was removed from it. It wasn’t, ‘Okay, and now I want you to say why you’re mad at her.’ It was none of that; that’s maybe what you would do with a kid. But with an adult, instead we just needed a format to think through.” Together, they focused on the issue at hand—the gap between planning three months ahead and one day ahead—and arrived at an agreed solution. Ms. Richards would plan out three days in advance. This would be a step in the right direction and would enable the two to have planning conversations together. “And I remember at the end of the protocol they were like, ‘I feel so much better now. I feel like this all was this giant weight and now it’s shifted.’ It was burdening all three of us because we knew it was this elephant in the room. And it was great to be able to try to address it and actually think of the solution.” Ms. Richards, the teacher working on planning ahead, told Ms. Turner she felt especially good about the direction the conversation had gone and was hopeful they would all be on track to better classroom preparation and collaboration.

Within a few weeks, however, the three were back at the table, the conflict still there. Ms. Richards had not managed to abide by the plan, and Ms. Albert was again frustrated. As Ms. Turner says, “They were still frustrated. They were still not communicating, and the lessons still weren’t as good as they could’ve been. And so then I realized that, you know, this teacher was just really, really struggling. And in using the protocol and pushing this conversation, the second time around, Ms. Richards cried, and she was like, ‘I can’t organize. I’m drowning this year.’” Ms. Richards continued, “You know, I didn’t know how hard this would be, and I’m just not ready.” All three realized that at that moment they had turned a corner.

“Honestly,” Ms. Turner says, “I really appreciated hearing her admit that, you know, it wasn't really working. And I know that Ms. Albert appreciated that truth as well. So, at that point, there was this moment of acceptance that, 'I'm struggling here.' Okay, fine. So, now I'm going to support you—as a PIC and a colleague—even heavier than I intended to do.” Ms. Turner made a commitment to Ms. Albert and Ms. Richards, and Ms. Albert and Ms. Richards were recommitting themselves to collaborate. Ms. Turner set a rigorous schedule of lunchtime planning meetings with Ms. Richards and worked hard to get her to the point where she was prepared several weeks in advance.

As the school year continued, the level of preparedness and collaboration in the co-teaching class increased. The edge was taken off the situation, and both Albert and Richards were able to reinvent themselves as partners in the classroom. As Ms. Turner recalls now, “I just snapped into support as almost like another co-teacher. And we got so far in advance that then what she was able to do was bring that work to her co-teacher, and they could go through that preparation process that they needed to go through.”

Both teachers are able to reflect on the change as well. As Ms. Albert says, “It's been better. I think we have had an easier time collaborating and planning ahead has been more beneficial. I feel I can now ask her, without upsetting her and without feeling like I'm her boss, 'Do you have something planned?'; it's allowed it to be a lot more equal in the room.” There were more realizations for Ms. Richards as well: “When we were running into conflicts we didn't have a whole lot of time to talk them out, we didn't have a model in which to discuss the problems. So it was really helpful to have the protocol and sort of have a framework; it had a structure and it worked really well for us.”

Was this the best solution for Ms. Turner and the team? “No solution is ever going to be totally perfect for all parties involved,” Ms. Turner reflects now, “and so you are often forced to prioritize. All the time—every day I have to prioritize.” Her background, the culture of shared leadership in the school, and the TIF training helped Ms. Turner to make a difficult decision around prioritizing. It was a decision that, in a prior year and without her TIF training, may have turned out differently. “You can only exercise that decision-making ability to prioritize if you have an awareness of what's going on and clear communication with all parties involved,” Ms. Turner says, “and TIF gave me the tools and training to start that communication and keep it open. As a result, in that solution I had to prioritize the kids. What I ended up doing is I prioritized their learning.”