

Connecting the Dots

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Staying Power: Teach for America Alumni in Public Education

By **Bridget Kelly**

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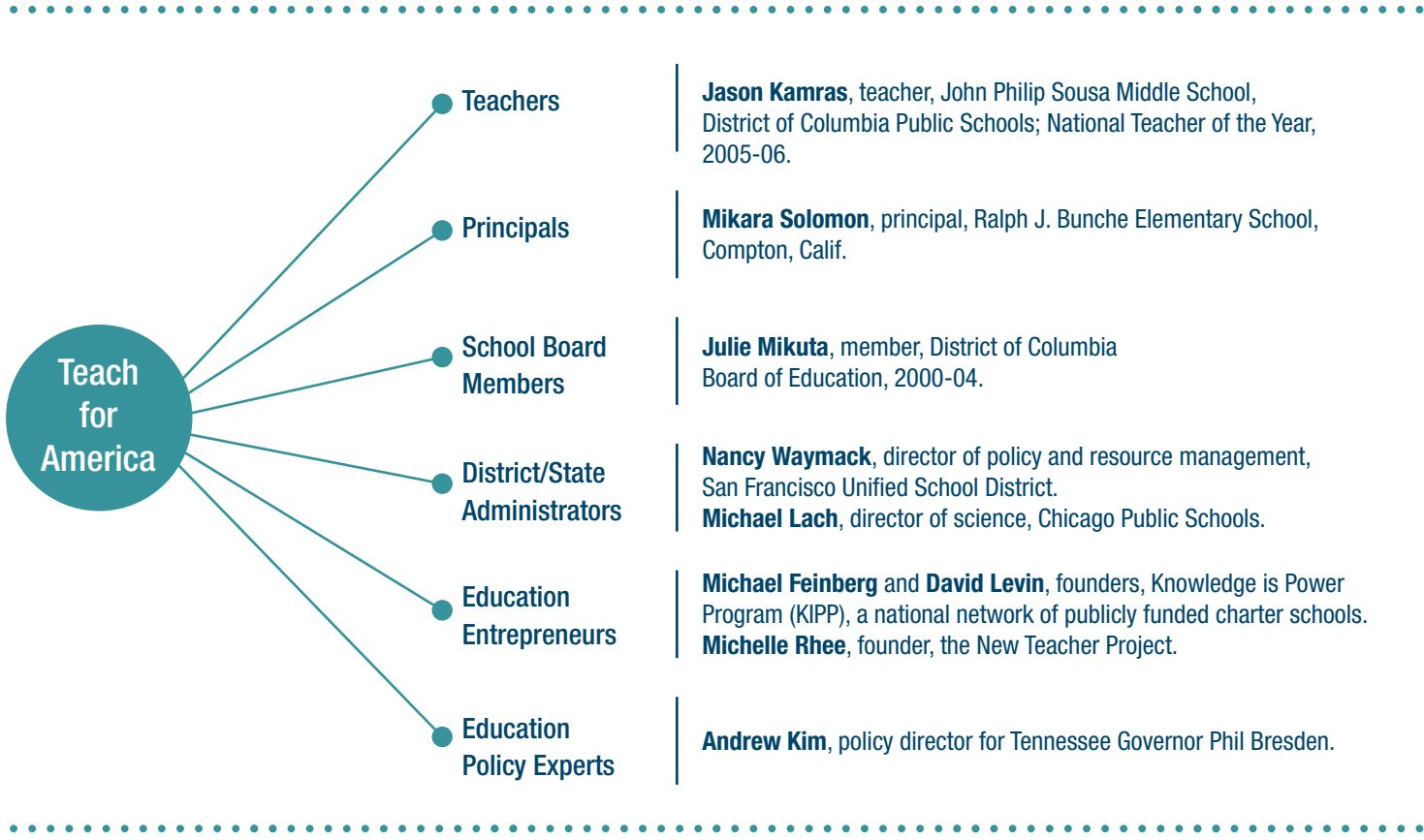
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It would be reasonable to expect recent college graduates entering Teach for America (TFA) to complete their two-year TFA teaching requirements in public schools and then move on. But that isn't happening. TFA alumni are increasingly working throughout the public education system.



Introduction

Teach for America, the Peace Corps-style organization that recruits graduates of top colleges to spend two years teaching in urban and rural public schools without first earning education degrees, is becoming a big enterprise. It is drawing a growing number of the nation's best and brightest into some of public education's most troubled schools. And they are staying. Rather than completing their two-year tours and moving on to law, banking, and other more lucrative fields, increasing numbers of TFA alumni are continuing to work in education in many different roles, many of them serving the nation's neediest students.

"Why doesn't the country have a national teacher corps to recruit as aggressively as we are being recruited to work on Wall Street?" Teach for America founder Wendy Kopp wondered back in the late 1980s as a student at Princeton. The question led to a senior thesis outlining such an organization, and then, in 1990, to TFA's first cadre of 500 teachers. Today, it has a staff of 350, a \$39 million budget, and 3,600 "corps members" in nearly two dozen locations from New York City to the Mississippi Delta.

Nearly 17,300 students applied to TFA in 2005, including 12 percent of the senior classes of Yale and Spelman, 11 percent of Dartmouth's seniors, and 8 percent of Harvard's. On many campuses, Kopp has vanquished Wall Street: TFA was the top employer of graduates from Duke, Georgetown, Scripps College, Washington University in St. Louis, and the University of North Carolina in 2005. TFA has become more selective than most of the nation's law and business schools, accepting only 17 percent of its applicants in 2005. What's more, nearly one in five TFA recruits is a math, science, or engineering major—the student who traditionally shuns public school teaching.

TFA spends about \$10,000 to recruit, select, train, and support each corps member and gets about \$1,500 a year per corps member from the school systems where it places teachers. The investment has paid off. A 2004 study by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., an independent organization, found that their students learn just as much reading as and more math than do the students of the other teachers in their schools.

In fall 2005, the organization announced plans to more than double its size to 8,000 corps members by 2010 with the help of a \$60 million capital campaign, a move that would also more than double the number of TFA alumni to over 20,000.

Critics charge that Teach for America is a revolving door and that corps members' interest in education is ephemeral. In fact, while many alumni speak of "surviving" their time in TFA under very difficult teaching conditions, TFA reports that 85 percent of its recruits finish their two-year commitments and over 60 percent remain in education longer than two years.

The alumni have taken on many roles, working on school boards, in state departments of education and governor's offices, as central office administrators, and as education entrepreneurs. Over 50 principals of traditional public schools and more than 80 principals of charter schools are TFA alumni, including two-thirds of the highly regarded KIPP charter schools. And 36 percent of TFA alumni have continued as classroom teachers, including Jason Kamras, the 2005 National Teacher of the Year.

TFA has also cultivated a commitment to education in a generation of leaders in a variety of other fields, as Kopp had hoped. Nearly half of the alumni who have left the education sector do work that helps low-income communities, according to a 2004 TFA alumni survey, and an additional 20 percent do volunteer work in such communities.

"It's probably impossible to do Teach for America and come out seeing the world in the same way," Kopp told an audience of Yale students in 2005. These are the stories of members of the expanding network of TFA alumni that not only sees the world differently but is working to change it.

Master Teacher

In the middle of **Jason Kamras's** second year as a Teach for America corps member in Washington, D.C., he made a decision about how he could best promote equality in education: keep teaching.

Although Kamras's commitment to Teach for America ended more than seven years ago, he has continued to teach in Washington at John Philip Sousa Middle School, leaving only to earn his master's degree in education at Harvard. That's because each year he has concluded, once again, he says, that "nothing would be as rewarding and as important to me as teaching." It is that drive and that yearly decision that led Kamras to be named National Teacher of the Year in 2005.

"I just really fell in love with my students and my school community," he says of his days as a beginning teacher. "I was just very excited to be standing in the classroom with children and really doing the work of teaching, day in and day out."

That love began long before he applied to the Teach for America corps in 1996. As a child, his mother told him stories about her New York City classroom, planting "the initial seed," Kamras says. In college, he explored his interest in education through the Student Volunteers Council at Princeton. His service activities included tutoring at an elementary school and a correctional facility. In the summer of his junior year, he was a member of the Volunteers in Service

to America corps, in which he helped develop an enrichment program for public school children in a Sacramento, Calif., housing complex.

That experience was his first long-term teaching experience, and its impact was lasting. “It was apparent that the children I was working with were already two, three years behind, given their age—I’m speaking on average, across the board,” he recalls. “It was abundantly clear to me that my students were very bright and very capable, but they had limited access to the best schools and the best teaching and as a result their achievement was suffering.”

Teachers

Jonathan Harris (Houston, 1992), national board certified teacher at Anderson High School, Austin, Texas. Several dozen TFA alumni are board-certified teachers

Hailly Korman (Los Angeles, 2002), kindergarten and first-grade teacher, 122nd Street Elementary School, Los Angeles; member, advisory board, National Council on Teacher Quality; writer; presenter at national education conferences

Steve Zimmer (Los Angeles, 1992), social studies teacher, John Marshall High School, Los Angeles; director, Marshall High School Multilingual Teacher Career Academy; family services director, Elysian Valley United, a community-based social-services agency in northeast Los Angeles

After some travel and a brief stint at the Israel Democracy Institute in Jerusalem following college, Kamras became a Teach for America corps member, dedicating himself to closing the achievement gap between students of privileged and less privileged backgrounds. Kamras has taught mathematics for most of his career, but he also taught social studies for two years after his return from Harvard. He says he finds the challenge of addressing each individual child’s needs an especially rewarding aspect of teaching.

“When you finally are able to make that connection and reach a student who perhaps you had not been able to, it’s incredible,” Kamras says.

Kamras recalls one student he taught in his very first year as a teacher who struggled with fractions. When Kamras finally hit on the idea of drawing diagrams to explain the concepts—“visual methodology” in education-speak—the student seemed to be almost instantly enlightened. The student’s next exam stood out in the stack of exams because it was covered with pictures that showed how he was processing the information visually.

In 1999, Kamras co-founded a digital photography project with his students that allowed them to process their own lives and communities visually. One of his objectives for the program, Expose, was to help the students take advantage of the many resources in Washington, D.C., such as museums. Students are trained to take photos on the field trips and then create autobiographical works.

But Kamras also wanted to use the program to expose Washington to his students.

“After I was teaching for a while I was a bit disheartened that people in the larger Washington community really didn’t know that much about my students, except for what they had read in the newspapers, or [seen] on TV,” he says. “I was sort of trying to find a way to connect these two worlds.”

The program has not only fostered connections but also—as an “added bonus,” Kamras says—reinforced math concepts for his students. (Think angle of view, pixels per inch, and shutter speeds.) Kamras has attracted about \$65,000 in grants for Expose, and in 2001 he was awarded the Mayor’s Art Award for Outstanding Contribution to Arts Education.

Should Kamras ever decide to take a break from the classroom, he does have a way to hold on to his identity. “I actually think no matter what you do in life, if you do it well, you’re a teacher in some capacity.”

Turnaround Artist

When **Mikara Solomon** became principal of Ralph J. Bunche Elementary School in Compton, Calif., the school was one of the lowest-ranked schools in the district. Six and one-half years later, Bunche tops the list and outperforms several schools in more affluent neighboring districts.

Solomon learned a valuable lesson when she began teaching in Compton in 1994 as a Teach for America corps member: All students can learn. So at age 27, when she became the principal of Bunche, she took bold steps to orient the entire school toward helping every student achieve.

“I absolutely did not tolerate teachers blaming students. The blame had to go to us as adults,” Solomon says. “I owned it—I’m a principal, I’m receiving a paycheck, so I’m part of the failure.”

Many teachers were infuriated by the disruption of the status quo; of the 30 teachers working at Bunche in Solomon’s first year, only one remains.

Principals

Tony Byrd (Los Angeles, 1993), principal, Cedar Valley Community School, Lynnwood, Wash.; former principal, Farnham Elementary School, San Jose, Calif.; California Teacher of the Year, 1995

Julie Jackson (Newark, 1994), principal, Northstar Academy, Newark, N.J., a charter school

Tracy Wright (District of Columbia, 1996), principal, Nalle Elementary School, Washington, D.C.

Under Solomon’s direction, teachers were urged to set goals for student achievement. Students were suspended “left and right,” Solomon says. She added a weekly staff development session and got teachers all the materials they needed—even if that meant yelling at the head of a warehouse. Every student at the school was assessed each Friday, and after-school tutoring and summer school were instituted. The changes steadily produced results: Over the past six

years, the school has climbed from 500 to 838 on California’s Academic Performance Index.

Solomon showed an aptitude for motivating fellow teachers from the start of her career. As a corps member, she was assigned to a bilingual second-grade classroom in Compton, and it “all clicked.” She recalls how she talked a roommate out of quitting TFA and provided her with some coaching. That roommate is now a principal.

“When you find your gift, you find your gift. Teaching—I had it,” Solomon says. “I really think it was some higher power.”

Her desire to make an impact on education that extended beyond her own classroom led her to earn a master’s of education at Columbia and ultimately become a principal.

While Solomon is currently on maternity leave, she continues to contribute to the Bunche school community and provides support to its acting principal. She is convinced that changing the culture of a school is the only way reform will come about.

Inside Jobs

Nancy Waymack knows that sometimes details that seem unconnected to the classroom can have a big impact on students. She gives a simple example: school renovation. Take out a bathroom, and classroom time will be cut. Why? Longer lines.

Waymack is the director of policy and resource management for the San Francisco United School District. She builds on her classroom experience as a Teach for America elementary school teacher in Houston to tackle urban education budgeting issues. “It helps me know which questions to ask, and it helps me to remember to include teachers and principals and other folks who are in schools every day,” Waymack says.

While a school district looks different from the perspective of a classroom teacher and from that of a central office, Waymack’s work relies on understanding and incorporating both points of

view: Her responsibilities include working with a community advisory committee to determine how best to allocate funds from a voter initiative and developing; the formula that allocates resources to schools for their budgets, called a “weighted student formula.”

“Instead of just giving [schools] money based on the number of kids they have, we look at the kids they have and say, are these kids who will need extra support because they’re English-language learners, or because they come from low-income families and haven’t had the opportunities other kids have had,” she says about the formula. “I think that’s been something that’s been really successful here and that I’m really proud to have worked on.”

Public School Administrators

Hae-Sin Kim (Bay Area, 1993), director of New School Development Group, Oakland (Calif.) Unified School District

Elizabeth Pauley (District of Columbia, 1993), director of leadership initiatives, Massachusetts Department of Education

Emily Qazilbash (Baltimore, 1993), received Harvard University’s Conant Fellowship; assistant director for Boston Public Schools’ Center for Leadership Development

Waymack did not expect to end up working in education administration. She was drawn to Teach for America in 1995, she says, because of its “altruistic nature” and thought she would focus on social welfare issues during her time as a graduate student of public policy at Georgetown. But, she says, “education had always kind of been an interest—my mom was a teacher, my sister’s a teacher, my aunt’s a teacher.”

So, after landing a job at the newspaper *Education Week* during graduate school, she decided to stay in education, but “in a little bit of a different way” from

other family members. A conversation with a TFA alumnus working in the District of Columbia public school system led her to a position in the system’s budget office in 1998. Three years later, she moved to San Francisco to help launch new budgeting initiatives in that city’s school system.

Waymack says she will be working in public education “for a good while.”

Despite the rise of publicly funded charter schools, she says, “most kids are still going to be in public education systems that are school districts, and in order to make sure that we’re changing things for every kid and every school, we need to change the system, not just a school or part of a school.”

Michael Lach has firsthand experience—eight years of it—to prove that economically disadvantaged children enjoy rigorous science when they are given the opportunity to learn it. His question now is, “How do you make that happen for 600 schools?”

As director of science for the Chicago Public Schools, Lach not only asks that question but answers it. While he acknowledges that school systems are “messy, bureaucratic structures,” he says he believes there are ways to create change. “[Chicago is] a really large urban school district that 15 years ago people said was the worst in the nation, but we’ve really gotten it to improve.”

Lach’s work is focused on figuring out the best way to deliver high-quality science instruction and how to recruit and support the staff that delivers such instruction. That translates into scads of meetings and conversations, some direct training work with principals and teachers, and even speeches. All of his work, he says, is informed by his own experience in the classroom.

His interest in finding a use for his degree in physics from Carleton College in Minnesota led to his placement in a Teach for America high school in New Orleans. The work was difficult at first, he admits.

He found himself in a very different culture and had to confront poverty in a way that he never had before. The lack of “intellectual drive” in the school

system troubled him. But in what he calls a “painful process,” Lach learned to do labs from scratch and to interact with his students in a positive way.

“I realized that I certainly could make a difference, and to have a bunch of kids who were into school and into science in as vigorous a way as I could figure out at the time was just great,” he says.

After three years of teaching, he went to work for Teach for America’s central office in New York City as director of program design, where he developed strategies for supporting TFA teachers in the field. The job inspired him to “practice what I preached.” He worked on his master of science education degree at Columbia and taught in New York City for a year before making the switch to the Chicago public school system.

“I really said, ‘Hey, I gotta find a pretty rough school, and I gotta stay there and make sure I’m an awesome teacher,’” Lach recalls. He ended up at Lake View High School.

That drive led him to relearn much of the physics he was teaching so that he could better explain it to his students. He also resolved to make sure he could execute at his own school each of the lab exercises used by a top Chicago high school. Soon he found himself regarded as one of the city’s best science teachers, earning the Illinois Outstanding High School Physics Teacher Award. He was named one of Radio Shack’s 100 Top Technology Teachers.

But after four years, he had the desire to do even more. “I’d gotten my classroom so it was good, and now I needed to change the whole school,” he relates. “It became clear that the school wasn’t going to change as fast as I wanted it to go.”

Lach decided to look at education from another angle, earning a 1999-2000 Albert Einstein fellowship to work on science and education policy in the U.S. Congress for Rep. Vernon Ehlers of Michigan.

“Members of Congress and high-schoolers aren’t that different,” Lach says with a laugh. “You have to manage [congressmen] very much how you manage kids.”

He then served as a consultant in Chicago for a year, developing a high school environmental science curriculum and providing new-teacher support. That work led to his present position as head of science for the Chicago Public Schools.

The Chicago school district historically had left curriculum decisions to its schools, and they didn’t do a particularly good job, Lach says. But today, he says, half the city’s public schools use a single, research-based science curriculum, and the results are much better. In addition, Lach and his staff devote time to training teachers and principals across the district, ensuring that there is adequate support and an open exchange of ideas.

Rhodes Work

Many reform-minded educators are involved in charter schools. But **Julie Mikuta** is one of the few who have not only helped to found a charter school—SEED Public Charter School in Washington, D.C.—but also shut down one (or, in her case, four). As a member of the District’s Board of Education from 2000 until 2004, one of Mikuta’s many responsibilities was authorizing charter schools. To her, a new school that just barely bests the one down the street is not good enough. “We need to stick our necks out,” says the 1991 Teach for America corps member, “and be courageous leaders.”

That can be difficult work. “It was just also very challenging to be the person who was out there in front all the time—to be the person who people rightly screamed at and said, ‘My child’s school’s not working,’” Mikuta says of her tenure on the D.C. school board.

Mikuta was first exposed to the challenges of urban public education as a Teach for America corps member in New Orleans, where the high school at which she taught science lacked science textbooks and lab equipment and where many of her students had parents who themselves had not graduated from high school. But Mikuta learned that dedicated teachers could overcome such obstacles. Eventually, she says, students “would cut classes where teachers weren’t engaging them in order to have a

second round of science in a day.” That experience, she says, “was pretty phenomenal.”

After completing her two-year tenure with Teach for America, Mikuta, who had attended Georgetown on a basketball scholarship, went to Oxford on a Rhodes scholarship (TFA alumnus Jeremy Robison is currently a Rhodes Scholar). Although she had joined Teach for America thinking she would eventually attend medical school, she pursued work in education at Oxford, researching how other countries—specifically England, Germany, and Scotland—educate their high-school-age children, particularly through vocational training options that lead to highly skilled jobs.

School Board Members

Natasha Barbic (Houston, 1991), school board member, Houston Independent School District

Adam Mitchell (San Francisco Bay Area, 1999), vice president, Ravenswood City School District, Ravenswood, Calif.

Layla Avila (Los Angeles, 1997), school board member, Whittier, Calif.

Back in the United States, Mikuta spend a summer working for the White House Domestic Policy Council, where she served on a charter school review board. That work led to her involvement in the SEED Public Charter School in Washington, D.C., in 1998—“building a school from scratch,” as she says. She served as director of special projects there for two years. Her responsibilities included curriculum and standards design, budgetary matters, and teaching math and science.

During that period, TFA alumni and other education advocates in Washington formed a group called EdAction to cultivate school board candidates, and they encouraged Mikuta to run. “Education is my passion,” she said in her letter to voters, “and the Board of Education needs members with solid education policy backgrounds.”

During her tenure on the board, Mikuta helped revise the District’s academic standards, and as co-chair of the board’s Committee on Teaching and Learning, she led the creation of a new teacher induction policy. She also instituted a 120-minute reading block in the elementary schools in the part of the city she represented. At the same time, she worked for Teach for America as vice president of alumni affairs, where she sought to recruit alumni as school leaders.

Mikuta is now a consultant for the nonprofit Center for Reform of School Systems, working with school boards in large urban school districts to promote reform. Her new position abides by a principle similar to that of Teach for America: A few people can make a big difference. “When a team of 10 [school board members] gets together around an idea or a pathway, school systems will move,” she says. Of course, she adds, “you have to get the right 10 people sitting around the boardroom table.”

School Builders

Thirteen years ago, **Michael Feinberg** and **David Levin** were frustrated elementary school teachers in the Houston school district. Each day they grew increasingly worried that the school system would “more or less screw up” their students in the future, Feinberg recalls.

But one night in late 1993, they hit on a possible way to ensure a lasting impact on their students. They sat down in front of a computer and began thinking and talking and typing, pouring out a response to their feelings of frustration and failure. With a U2 CD on repeat, they worked through the night. “At about five o’clock in the morning, we had KIPP on the computer screen,” Feinberg says.

KIPP, or the Knowledge is Power Program, in its first incarnation was designed for 50 Houston fifth-graders in 1994. KIPP Academy Houston and KIPP Academy New York emerged that year, under the guidance of Feinberg and Levin respectively. Today, there are 45 KIPP schools in 15 states and the District of Columbia, and many of the schools—and their founders—have earned accolades for their work with middle-school students.

Feinberg and Levin both say their early experiences in the classroom were difficult. “In a sick way, I was still enjoying it after a few months,” says Feinberg, “but on a daily basis, I was very depressed because I realized how horrible I was.” He adds, “Once I got it under control and realized there was the potential for the kids to learn a lot, then I started getting very hungry to get better.”

Levin views KIPP as a natural extension of that desire to strive to continue doing better, to continue doing more with his students, instead of pointing a finger at others. While he agrees that his first year in the classroom was “very, very challenging,” he was immediately hooked. “As soon as I started teaching, I knew I was going to stay in forever,” Levin says. “By Thanksgiving of my first year, I definitely knew I was going to be in it for the long run. It’s hard to explain it, but it was just like this gut feeling.”

Other Education Entrepreneurs:

Chris Barbic (Houston, 1992), founder and executive director, YES College Prep School, Houston

Julia Grace (New York City, 1996), executive director, Reach for Excellence, Atlanta. Participants in the tuition-free program for middle-schoolers attend classes on Saturdays and during summers to get them ready for college-preparatory programs

Kim Smith (Baltimore, 1998), co-founder and chairman, New Schools Venture Fund

Both Feinberg and Levin came to teaching through Teach for America in 1992 with little prior teaching experience aside from tutoring. Feinberg, who graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1991 with a degree in international relations, worked for then-Illinois Sen. Paul Simon for a year before becoming part of the corps.

Levin was recruited to TFA while a senior at Yale, where he was a history major with a concentration in history of education. He intended to go into policy when he graduated, but an adviser suggested that he didn’t have a very good grounding in the realities

of public education. Go teach, the adviser said, and Levin did, through TFA.

Now, Levin and Feinberg juggle a plethora of KIPP-related responsibilities. They are co-founders of the KIPP Foundation, a six-year-old nonprofit organization initially funded by Gap Inc. founders Don and Doris Fisher, which opens and supports KIPP schools nationwide. And they are co-directors of the KIPP School Leadership Program, which recruits and trains leaders for new KIPP schools.

But teaching remains their touchstone, says Levin, who still finds time to teach fifth-grade math.

And Teach for America plays no small role in KIPP’s expansion: Over 40 percent of KIPP teachers are TFA alumni.

Michelle Rhee’s parents wanted her to become a doctor or a lawyer. But in college, she saw a PBS special on Teach for America that led her to choose education instead. More than a decade later, Rhee has helped thousands of others enter education.

Rhee is the founder of the New Teacher Project, a nonprofit organization that helps recruit teachers to work with disadvantaged students. Since 1997, the organization has brought more than 13,000 new teachers into public schools in 21 states, including 18 percent of New York City’s math and special education teachers in recent years.

Rhee entered teaching in Baltimore in 1992. Teach for America had just begun its program there, and Rhee was placed in what she calls one of the worst performing schools in Baltimore city. She and another teacher team-taught low-achieving second-graders.

It wasn’t easy. In addition to her students’ educational struggles, she faced colleagues who didn’t think the school’s mostly African-American students could learn and she felt out of place in the school as a Korean-American.

“I had a very, very tough first year,” Rhee says. “I had made up my mind sort of in the middle of my first year: OK, my second year is going to be different.”

After a summer of planning, she and a colleague decided to “loop” with the same group of students during the teachers’ second and third years and also expanded the school day. “But we also just pushed the kids—sometimes giving them two hours of homework a day,” Rhee says. “It definitely set the class apart in the school.” Her students jumped from the 13th percentile to the 90th percentile in reading over the two years they were together, Rhee says. She attributes this success not so much to “what I was doing” but to having high expectations for students and making them work hard.

But Rhee also saw that students required strong teachers in subsequent years in order to sustain their gains. And there just weren’t enough such teachers to go around.

After finishing her TFA tenure, Rhee earned a master’s degree in public policy from Harvard. And then, in a phone conversation with TFA founder Kopp, she learned that school districts with severe teacher shortages were calling TFA, asking for help with recruitment above and beyond the teachers that TFA could supply. Rhee realized that there was an opportunity to address the problem she first saw in Baltimore during her TFA assignment. Kopp donated office space to Rhee, and the New Teacher Project was born.

At first, the focus was on recruiting teachers for low-performing schools and hard-to-staff subject areas. More recently, the group’s work has expanded to include teacher certification programs, strategic partnerships, and educational research. Each is designed to encourage, in different ways, the hiring of high-quality teachers. The organization recently released *Unintended Consequences: The Case for Reforming the Staffing Rules in Urban Teachers Union Contracts*, a report that documents the way in which union-backed hiring rules undermine teacher quality.

Rhee’s work in Baltimore continues to motivate her. “Those kids showed me that they were capable of achieving at incredibly high levels,” she says. The low performance of many Baltimore students she saw “never had to do with their lack of ability—it had to do with the adults in their community.” Not surprisingly, many TFA alumni work for Rhee.

Policy Wonk

When **Andrew Kim** taught through Teach for America in Baton Rouge in 1992 and 1993, he and his colleagues had to ask students to bring in rolls of toilet paper for the school. In one fourth-grade class he taught, there were 34 students, and nearly every one of them qualified for federally subsidized lunches. While many of his college friends were interviewing for major consulting firms, Kim was drawn to the way Teach for America put recent graduates “on the front lines” to improve education. That’s where Kim ended up.

“You do everything you can to make every day a little more productive and find the small victories in things, instead of thinking, ‘I’ve got to turn this whole classroom around and put these kids on a whole different career path,’” he says. Kim had studied education issues as a government and public policy major at Wesleyan University in Connecticut. “But when you experience the realities of poverty and social justice and race through the eyes of real children, it is all far more complicated that you can imagine.”

A decade later, Kim is the policy director for Tennessee Gov. Phil Bredsen and manages several education projects a year, including one that involved his chairing a state task force on teacher pay. More recently, he developed a statewide pre-kindergarten initiative for Bredsen that won approval by the Tennessee Legislature and is now being implemented.

It was his time in Baton Rouge that led Kim to education policymaking. After earning a master’s degree in public policy from Duke, he went to work for the Public Education Network, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit organization that supports a network of local education funds across the nation to change public education through community involvement. From there, Kim went back to his home state, Tennessee, to do business development work for its Department of Economic and Community Development. He continued working in the field of economic and technology development at the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce and then at the Tennessee Technology Development Corp.

But Kim’s desire to connect with kids didn’t wane. “I really missed something about [TFA], the interaction with kids. So I joined this program called Big Brothers Big Sisters.” Kim was assigned a 7-year-old to mentor. Six years later, Kim is still involved in the program—and has the same “little brother.”

Education Policy Experts

Kristin Bannerman (Houston, 1996), education policy adviser, Sen. Lamar Alexander of Tennessee

Scott Joftus (Los Angeles, 1991), co-founder and president of Cross & Joftus, an education policy consulting firm

Heather Urban (South Louisiana, 1996), policy director, Sen. Harry Reid of Nevada

One of the projects Kim is most proud to have worked on as the governor’s policy director is Teach Tennessee. A teacher recruitment program targeting Tennessee-based midcareer professionals, it was “really based on my experience,” he says. Kim wanted to see whether the state could tap into a new pool of potential teachers, just as Teach for America does by reaching out to college seniors and recent college graduates.

“It seems to me there are always people willing and ready to take on a challenge when it comes to teaching and education,” Kim reflects. “It’s almost the harder you make it seem and the more challenging you make it seem, those are the kinds of people who you want to come to the forefront.”

Applicants to the program came from workplaces as diverse as the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Oak Ridge National Laboratory. The first set of corps members—35 in all—entered Tennessee classrooms in fall 2005.