

# Solutions through Teacher Leadership



**NYS Strengthening Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Grant (STLE)**  
A partnership between:  
**NYC Department of Education and Teaching Matters**



**Great teachers.  
Bright futures.**

# The Challenge

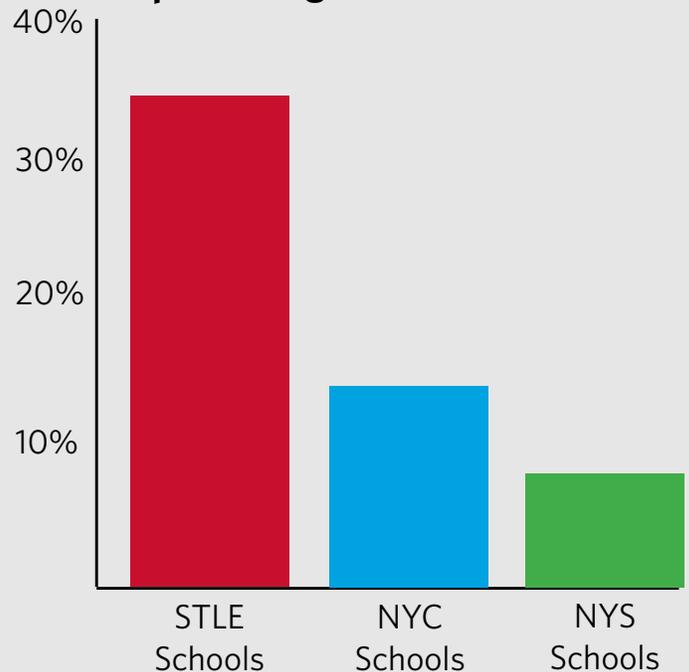
Urban schools face a stark demographic reality: the populations of students with special needs and English Language Learners (ELLs) are ballooning and the ranks of teachers equipped to offer instruction that meets their special needs hasn't kept pace.

**Nationally, ELLs make up about 14% of students in urban areas and students with special needs are about 13%. The Bronx is a microcosm with similarly high numbers, and about 30% of students identified as ELLs concurrently have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).**

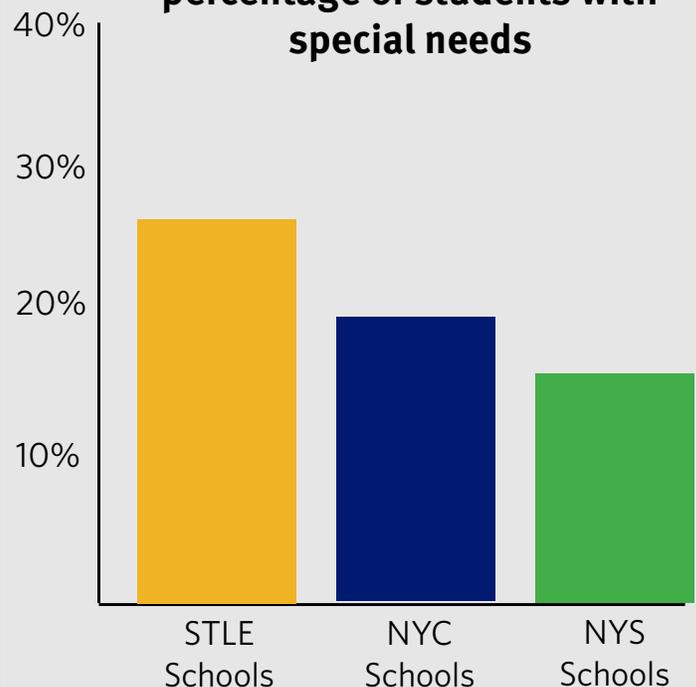
The need is urgent: ELLs and students with special needs are at least 19% less likely to graduate.

Because students with special needs and ELLs are present in every type of classroom, it's not just specialized teachers who require the tools to effectively educate them. It's a more general school and system-wide concern. How can the right knowledge and competencies be efficiently shared among all teachers?

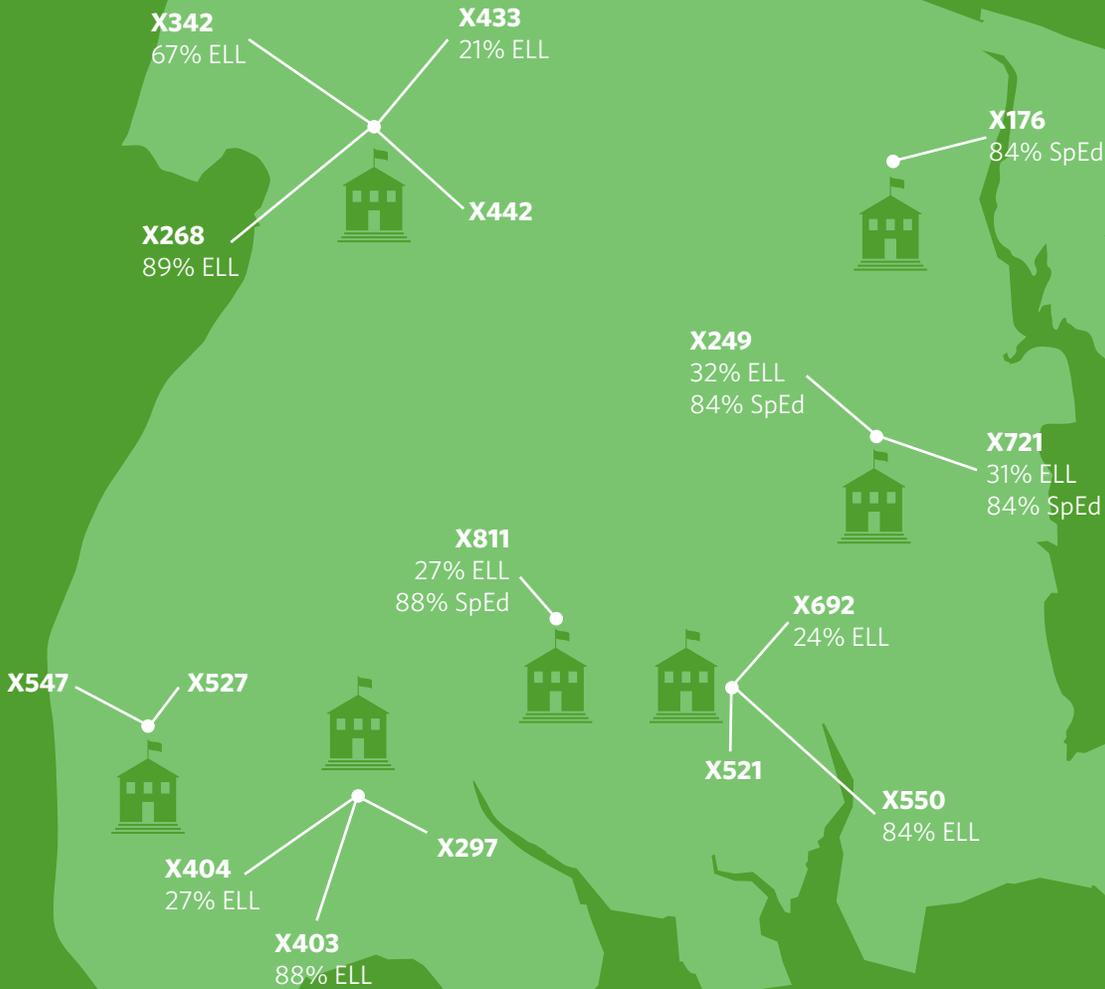
**STLE schools have a higher percentage of ELLs**



**STLE schools have a higher percentage of students with special needs**



# The Bronx, New York STLE Schools



16  
Schools

44  
Teacher  
Leaders

783  
Teachers

7,837  
Students



# The Opportunity

In recent years, education leaders have championed teacher leadership as a means of spreading specialized instructional knowledge and skills to all teachers.

For the 2014-2015 school year, the NYC DOE and the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) committed to a new career ladder for teachers that established clearly defined teacher leader roles: Master Teacher and Model Teacher. With funding from the Strengthening Teacher and Leader Effectiveness (STLE) grant, the NYC DOE implemented a rigorous process to recruit and select 29 high quality candidates in 16 Bronx schools to fill these roles, and provided a coaching model focused on facilitating adult learning.

In addition to extra planning time for Master and Model Teachers, the NYC DOE and the UFT agreed to a new contract that provides all teachers at least 90 minutes per week to engage in learning that would advance key school priorities. These priorities included improving learning opportunities for ELLs and students with special needs.

**These new structures enabled the 16 STLE schools to prepare teacher leaders, ELL specialists, and special education teachers for leading learning communities that ensure all teachers have the skills they need to advance the learning of ELLs and students with special needs.**



# The Solution

## Teaching Matters' Unique Approach

It would be prohibitively expensive and time-consuming for school systems to give each individual teacher extensive training in ELL or special education practices. But there is a way to multiply the strengths of those colleagues who already have that content knowledge and provide them something valuable in return. Investing in tailored teacher leadership with the participation of special education and ELL faculty is the ready answer.

The heart of Teaching Matters' unique approach is assembling and educating teacher leaders, ELL specialists, and special education teachers in both adult learning and selected ELL and special education competencies. Participants develop their knowledge, skills, and behaviors in both of these areas through a series of institutes, onsite coaching, and Teaching Matters' micro-credentialing process. Participants learn effective practices of team inquiry and examine pedagogy related to teaching special populations. Fundamentally, each becomes able to speak the other's language and understand the other's challenges and goals. They can then lead inquiry teams geared toward acquiring both types of knowledge and skills and toward improving teaching practice school-wide.

Besides spreading best practices in special education and teaching ELLs throughout schools, a team approach specifically benefits special education and ELL teachers who often feel isolated from collaboration with peers.

Micro-credentialing for teacher leadership, a Teaching Matters' innovation, is integral to this concept and process. Teaching Matters awards micro-credentials to those who demonstrate key teacher leadership competencies as a way to recognize and enrich their learning. Based on Teaching Matters' Teacher Leadership Competencies Rubric and the National Teacher Leader Model Standards, these micro-credentials present a rigorous and nationally normed assessment process and a means to measure impact on teacher practice.

From March through June, 2015, Teaching Matters introduced this unique approach to the 16 schools participating in the STLE grant.

## Building Knowledge



## Applied Practice



## Evidence of Mastery



# Institute Series

## Leading Teachers

Prepares principals and teacher leaders in best practices for shared leadership. Facilitators include:

- Kim Marshall
- Ellie Drago-Severson
- Paul Bambrick-Santoyo
- Lee Teitel

## Leading Teacher Teams

Prepares teacher leaders, ELL specialists and special education teachers to co-lead teacher teams.

- Facilitate effective teams
- Lead structured inquiry cycles
- Analyze ELL and special education data

## High Impact Practices

Prepares teacher leaders, ELL Specialists, and SpEd teachers.

- Meet the Needs of Diverse Learners
- Adapt Materials for Diverse Learners in LRE
- Implement Sheltered Instructional Observation Protocol (SIOP)

## Onsite Coaching

Teaching Matters coaches support teacher leaders, ELL specialists, and special education teachers to facilitate team inquiry through observation and targeted feedback.

Feedback  
& Reflection

Collaborative  
Planning and  
Goal Setting

Observed  
Practice

## Micro-credentials



### Key Competencies:

- Change Agent: Influence decisions
- Facilitator: Facilitation of team meetings
- Protocol Pro: Use of protocols
- Data Analyst
- Goal Setter: Setting & monitoring goals
- Researcher: Use of research
- Learning Facilitator: Use of coaching approaches
- Instructional Specialist: Guiding instructional strategies for ELLs and special education students

# Leading Change at the High School for Careers and Living

At X811, the High School for Careers and Living in the Bronx, the three teacher leaders selected for the NYC DOE's Strengthening Teacher and Leader Effectiveness (STLE) program believe it has been transformative. "It's a real culture shift," says Master Teacher Rebecca Schropfer, a nine year teaching veteran. And recent dramatic gains in teacher effectiveness, she and her colleagues say, seem tightly tied to the change. Whereas fewer than 2% got a "highly effective" Danielson rating last year, this year about 33% did.

X811, a school in district 75 school with a staff of about 80 teachers and 300 para-professionals, uses a rigorous functional academic curriculum to serve approximately 630 special education students who have a wide range of physical and cognitive disabilities and varied learning abilities. In addition, 27% of students are English Language Learners. Formulating and assessing their work can be especially difficult, since tests used in the general population are often inapplicable - and that's why the STLE model of anchoring

teacher leadership skills in this particular context is so important.

Besides Master Teacher Schropfer, two Model Teachers participated in the STLE program: Cassandra Baptise, who has been teaching for a decade, and Michelle Fagnoli, with four years under her belt. Through STLE, they received a blend of DOE and Teaching Matters support. The DOE introduced the program, and later in the year, Teaching Matters joined in to concentrate on teacher leader team building in the SpEd and ELL context and the use of micro-credentials. Each of the teacher leaders attended a series of institutes designed to help them lead their peers. These institutes combined the skills necessary to lead teacher teams with targeted strategies to teach ELL or SpEd students. Once back at their school, they worked with a Teaching Matters coach. The arc of the program was to acquire specific teacher leadership competencies, implement them through supported practice in the school context, and then to deepen, assess, and refine these skills and knowledge through the Teaching Matters' micro-credentialing process.

The STLE's overall support and Teaching Matters' group processes and coaching were considered extremely valuable by teacher leaders. Baptise explained how they moved toward greater skill in planning and assessment - a significant challenge when traditional teaching means and measures for general education students are not always useful. She pointed to an 8-week cycle of "Looking at Student Work," during which they collaborated in grading, benchmarking tasks, creating an action plan to further develop a lesson, and outlining the most useful practices for teaching ELA to Special Education and ESL students. "We shared our results during our school-wide collaborative inquiry meetings," she said, and "we received support as teacher leaders from our fellow teaching peers."

**“There was evidence of progress which was a direct result of teacher leader support.”**

- Rosa Nieves Greene  
Principal, X811

The process of observation, feedback and reflection via onsite coaching, as well as the micro-credentialing process, made X811 teacher leaders stretch. Fagnoli recently received a "data analyst"

badge. Though she had started tackling the topic previously, she said having a rubric that clearly defined what best practice looks like “really helped put me on track,” and the specific expectations, protocols, and one-on-one guidance from her Teaching Matters’ coach bolstered her ability to lead a successful team, focus on the most essential, and better meet the needs of teachers. Baptiste found similar value. “Being observed and coached during a [team] inquiry session allowed me to revisit the areas that need improvement.

in his final evaluation, up from “developing” and “effective” ratings the year before.

Watts can’t say enough about the importance of peer support, which he considers very different from the more daunting prospect of seeking help from a boss. He is happy with the changes and believes school morale has risen, too. “If I can be honest, in the beginning, when they started talking about the inter-visitation, I’m like, ‘Ah, man, having people come to my room and do observations.’

## **Specific expectations, protocols, and one-on-one guidance from Teaching Matters’ coaches bolstered the ability to lead successful teams, focus on the most essential, and better meet the needs of teachers.**

Baptiste is also proud to have the recognition micro-credentials confer. “There is a sense of pride that as a teacher leader, I am helping to make salient contributions to my school’s community, and receiving a badge demonstrates that meaningful work is taking place.”

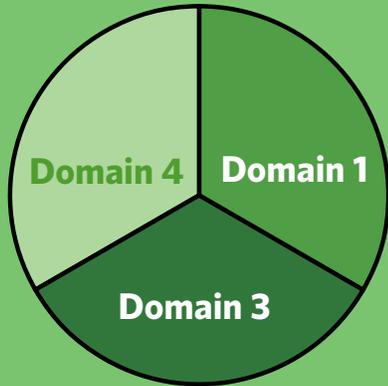
**X811’s** teacher leaders are eager for Teaching Matters’ and NYC DOE combined support to continue and expand to a full-year schedule. They think it will aid in retaining excellent teachers, among other benefits. For Schropfer, who has already earned a degree in administration, “nothing could have informed me like this program.” And Fagnoli is delighted with the career ladder aspect. “I still get to stay in the classroom and still do what I love to do, but grow as a professional...we need good teachers to stay.”

Other teachers not directly trained by the program also cited its benefits to their practice. Michael Watts, a second-year teacher, linked his significant professional growth in serving his special education students to his teacher leader, Fagnoli, for sharing her own methods and resources. Watts got three of four “highly effective” ratings

After participating in it, I found it really, really useful,” Watts said.

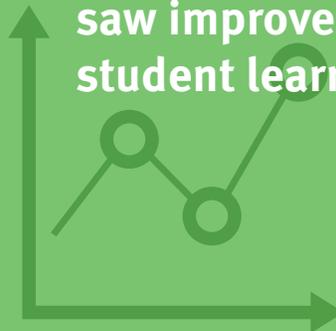
The gains that the school made during the STLE program couldn’t have happened without Principal Rosa Nieves Greene, who can see the results. “Teachers feel appreciated and comfortable going to these teacher leaders for support,” she said. “There have definitely been positive changes in teacher observation outcomes since the program started,” and “There was evidence of progress which was a direct result of teacher leader support.” Furthermore, said Nieves Greene, “The positive outcomes were well worth the time spent,” and the school will be continuing with the program next year.

# Impact



Principals saw improvement in Danielson Domains

100% of principals saw improvement in student learning



44 teacher leaders and 783 teachers



87% of teachers saw improvement in their effectiveness



7,700 students





# Key Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested for school districts looking to employ teacher leadership roles to support improved achievement for special populations:

1. Define teacher leaders competencies in two distinct areas a) strategies for leading adult learning and b) strategies for teaching ELL and Sped students.
2. Co-develop teacher leaders and ELL and SPED content specialists in alignment to these competencies.
3. Ensure coaching models integrate cycles of observation and feedback.
4. Ensure schedules allow ELL and SPED content specialists to participate with general education teachers in professional learning communities.
5. Formally recognize competency mastery by linking it to role and pay incentives.

Teaching Matters is an organization dedicated to increasing teacher effectiveness, one of the most critical factors in student success. Our services transform how educators work together at urban public schools, helping the most effective teachers develop the skills they need to lead their peers and drive school-wide improvement. We also partner with school leadership to create a work environment that equips teachers to succeed in the classroom.

From nearly 20 years of working in urban public schools, we've developed an understanding of realistic and lasting ways to improve student outcomes, and we're committed to real, measurable results.

We are a non-profit. **We stand out** among other groups trying to raise teacher performance because of our commitment to the public interest, and our nearly two decades of experience fighting for urban students' futures.

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**Great teachers. Bright futures.**

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