

How District 6 Turned a System Adoption into Classroom Gains

Teaching Matters Case Study: NYC Reads Implementation



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About Teaching Matters

Teaching Matters is a national nonprofit dedicated to ensuring that every child, no matter zip code, has equitable access to great teaching. Our mission is to close the opportunity gap of a radically unequal education system for underserved and historically marginalized children by strengthening teaching, leadership, and instructional systems. For 30 years, we have supported over 1,500 schools to advance academic achievement; deepened the teaching practice of 35,000-plus teachers; and impacted the learning of over 600,000 students. We bring deep knowledge, experience, and a commitment to effective, research-based school and district support. Our team of over 80 coaches partners with teachers, school leaders, and district teams to translate research into practice, build local capacity, and drive lasting improvements in teaching and learning.

Acknowledgements

This case study would not have been possible without the educators and leaders of Community School District 6, who shared their experiences with honesty and generosity. Teaching Matters is grateful to Superintendent Renzo Martinez, Deputy Superintendent Camille Wallin, and the many educators, instructional leaders and district staff who show up every day for the students of D6. We are also grateful to the Teaching Matters coaches and staff whose expertise, care, and commitment help make this partnership possible.

A Note from *Carolyn Quintana, CEO*

At Teaching Matters, we know that meaningful instructional change does not come from a new curriculum or initiative alone. It comes from district leaders who create the conditions for change, and from the educators and coaches who bring that work to life in classrooms everyday.

District 6 is a proof point — NYC Reads opened the door, but coherence, commitment, and sustained coaching allowed the work to take hold for implementation. Leaders held a clear vision steady. Coaches and educators worked side by side, strengthening practice school by school. Over time, instruction across the district became more purposeful, more student-centered, and more sustainable.

That is the work that matters most: turning strong ideas into stronger experiences and better outcomes for students.

Introduction

In the first full year of NYC Reads — New York City’s push to standardize literacy curriculum and accelerate reading outcomes — Community School District 6 in Washington Heights-Inwood saw ELA proficiency jump from 40.4 percent to 48.7 percent for grades 3 through 5. Gains of that size are unusual so early in a major curriculum shift. In D6, a trusted partnership with Teaching Matters helped Superintendent Renzo Martinez turn NYC Reads from a top-down mandate into infrastructure for building coherence across 38 schools. This case study traces the coaching model, district strategy and shared commitment behind those gains.



Context: A System-Level Shift Meets School Reality

NYC Reads marked one of the most significant system-led literacy shifts in city history—a citywide effort to standardize high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) and accelerate reading outcomes for all students. The initiative reflects a growing body of evidence that rigorous, knowledge-building curriculum is one of the most powerful levers for improving outcomes, particularly for students who have historically been under-challenged. NYC Reads was built on the belief that every student deserves access to grade-level texts, tasks, and content every day.

But system mandates do not automatically change classroom realities. As NYC Reads was announced, schools were navigating:

- Initiative fatigue from years of reforms and shifting priorities
- Varying school capacity with uneven leadership structures, data systems, and instructional coherence
- Limited materials and tight timelines making implementation difficult



All of it left teachers asking: “Is this going to stick? Or will this too pass?” Large-scale curriculum adoption almost always produces an initial dip in teacher confidence and instructional quality before it produces gains. The districts that move through that dip fastest are the ones that treat implementation as a learning problem, rather than a compliance problem, and that invest in coaching to support teachers through the transition.

For D6 Superintendent Renzo Martinez, the question wasn’t whether to take NYC Reads seriously—it was how to make it tangible at every level of the system. “For any initiative to take place and take root,” he explained, “we have to work in layers. It cannot live only with one person, one coach, one team, or one school. The work has to move across the district team, principals, coaches, teachers, and classrooms so that everyone understands the vision and their role in making it real.”

The Starting Point

District 6, comprising 38 schools in the Washington Heights and Inwood community, entered NYC Reads as a Phase 1 implementation district. Schools had piloted the EL Education curriculum the prior year, which meant staff had some exposure, but implementation was uneven, messaging was inconsistent across schools, and depth of understanding varied widely.

Martinez came into his second year as superintendent with a clear instructional focus: Tier 1 instruction using the EL Education curriculum, implemented with coherence across every school. The district's stated goal of "Driving Excellence: Grade-Level Texts, Tasks and Content Every Day" was a direct extension of the NYC Reads vision. But focus alone wasn't enough. "We knew where we were going, we knew what we wanted to accomplish," he said, "but the real question was: How do we move all the pieces together? How do we make sure the professional learning, coaching, school leadership, classroom practice, and monitoring systems are all connected and moving in the same direction?"

The district also faced a challenge common to many urban systems: coaching was siloed. The most enthusiastic teachers tended to get the most support, while others fell further behind. "What Teaching Matters and our collaboration did is we brought coaching out of the silo—so that everybody kept rising."

D6 had a head start as they had already begun implementing EL Education curriculum and Teaching Matters was a professional learning partner before NYC Reads launched. That prior relationship mattered. "Having an established relationship with Teaching Matters made the work stronger," Martinez recalled. "Since we had already worked together for a couple of years, there was trust, clarity, and a shared understanding of our district priorities. That existing relationship made it easier to move quickly, adjust when needed, and deepen the work across schools." Trust was not assumed—it was already earned.



Systematic Support and Delivery

Unlike providers who arrive with a fixed program, Teaching Matters began by listening and diagnosing. Coaches conducted a structured capacity assessment to understand each school's starting point across four dimensions:

- Structures: professional learning communities (PLCs), data routines, instructional planning systems, multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) alignment
- Culture: trust, feedback norms, coachability
- Materials: access, alignment, and functionality
- Leadership: walkthrough routines, instructional vision, and team coherence

This assessment ensured coaching was responsive to where schools were actually starting. Each school received a co-developed coaching plan with predictable visit purposes, defined coaching priorities, and a commitment to post-visit documentation and next steps to signal from the outset that coaching was a partnered practice, not an evaluative one.



Working with Teaching Matters has given us the opportunity to first learn the research behind the instructional practices we are currently implementing through NYC Reads. They do a great job of assessing exactly where our teachers are in the moment to provide the right support during implementation.”

— Boris Consuegra, Principal at P.S. 115 Alexander Humboldt in District 6

At the district level, TM and D6 co-created the work from the start. District staff brought knowledge of what was coming from central office and what schools were experiencing on the ground. TM brought coaching and facilitation expertise. As TM coach Lance Ozier described: “It’s co-planned and collaborative—it takes a lot of back-end work. We couldn’t do this work justice without them, and they’ve really benefited from the coaching and facilitation expertise that Teaching Matters brings.”

The partnership was grounded in a shared framework drawn from research on trajectory-changing schools: three mutually reinforcing conditions—Belonging, Consistency, and Coherence—that D6 and TM adapted to guide the work.

Belonging	Consistency	Coherence
Adults feel trusted, valued, and connected to a clearly articulated shared vision.	Teachers across schools are empowered to deliver high-quality instruction.	All systems (Professional Learning, Coaching, Monitoring, Feedback) reinforce each other.
TM and D6 build positive relationships, shared language, and trust across coaches, school leaders, and the district team.	Teachers, coaches, and instructional leaders implement shared curriculum with integrity and participate in job-embedded professional learning.	Instructional Leadership Teams engage in curriculum-grounded professional learning supported by districtwide structures aligned to NYC Reads priorities.

What Coaching Looked Like in Practice

Coaching centered on five high-leverage practices applied consistently across schools while being adapted to each school's context based on both the capacity assessment and TM coaching expertise.

Unit Unpacking and Lesson Internalization

Coaches worked with teachers to unpack units by working backward from assessments to standards, skills, and pacing. D6 and TM collaboratively developed a suite of shared tools—the EL Lesson Internalization Tool, EL Lesson Look-Fors (teacher-facing and walkthrough versions), and a Principal Practice Observation (PPO) Classroom Visit Tool—that aligned planning, coaching, and monitoring to the same instructional priorities. “In that lesson internalization tool we created together,” Martinez explained, “there was a focus on making sure we moved instruction to more student-centered, because we want students doing most of the work.”

Side-by-Side Coaching

Coaches worked alongside teachers during instruction, offering real-time feedback and adjustments, intentionally positioned as partners achieving shared goals rather than evaluators. This repositioned observation and feedback as a collaborative practice—a culture shift that proved essential in a school system where teachers had experienced many reform cycles that delivered evaluation but not support.

Implementation with Integrity

One of the most significant shifts in District 6 was a deliberate move away from “fidelity implementation” and toward “integrity implementation.” The fidelity framing had led many teachers to read curriculum scripts verbatim—technically compliant but pedagogically inert. As Ozier explained: “With integrity, teachers have a lot of choice and agency and discretion over parts of that lesson narrative.” This shift restored teacher professionalism within the curriculum structure, leading to more responsive, engaging instruction.

Monthly Districtwide Workshops

In addition to school-level coaching, TM and D6 built a districtwide professional learning structure: monthly workshops that brought Teaching Matters coaches, district coaches, and a designated NYC Reads liaison from each school together in the same room. Each session included four to five portable micro-sessions that teacher leaders could take directly back to their schools—fully developed with materials, speaker notes, and facilitation resources.

Over the year, these sessions covered a carefully sequenced arc: curriculum implementation tools and job-embedded support models in September; deepening student engagement with complex text in November; empowering new teachers in December; writing for understanding in January; and a two-part explicit instruction series in February and March. Each session was shared with principals and assistant principals at their monthly meetings, then expected to be turnkeyed to instructional staff at each school.

This structure accomplished something that had proven elusive: consistent messaging across an entire district. When the superintendent personally attended TM coach meetings to set direction, it reinforced that coherence from the very top. “I remember myself going to the Teaching Matters coaches’ meeting,” Martinez said, “so that they could hear from me, the superintendent, where we were going with the work. I think that’s something that doesn’t happen all the time.”

SUPPORTING MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

D6 serves a high proportion of English language learners and students with disabilities. From the outset, the coaching model was designed to address their needs explicitly as a core feature rather than an add on service.

Unit unpacking sessions built in dedicated planning time for multilingual learners and students with IEPs, aligning interventions to Tier 1 rather than treating them as a separate track. The district’s instructional focus committed to a robust Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) that meets the needs of all students, with a focus on English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities. The jointly developed EL Look-Fors included specific indicators for scaffolding, language supports, and equitable access to grade-level content.

Current English learners in grades 3-5 saw proficiency grow by more than 60 percent, rising from 9.9 percent to 16.2 percent for school year 2024-25. Students with disabilities in grades 3-5 gained seven percentage points in ELA proficiency, rising from 20.6 percent to 27.6 percent proficient.

What Made the Partnership Work

Co-Creation and Genuine Thought Partnership

The most important structural feature of the D6 partnership was that TM and the district built the work together, month by month, in response to what was actually happening in schools. **Sessions were not designed in advance and delivered to the district, they were co-planned, with district staff contributing knowledge of central office priorities and school realities, and coaches contributing curriculum expertise and facilitation capacity.** Neither side could have done the work without the other.

This also meant the partnership was grounded in local context in ways that matter for large urban districts. **Coaches brought experience working in New York City schools**—familiarity with school schedules, the political context of reform, and the specific rhythms of NYCPS. That context meant coaches were not learning the environment at the same time they were trying to support it, and it accelerated trust-building with principals and teachers who had seen plenty of outside providers come and go.

The co-creation model also served as a safeguard against the most common failure mode in coaching partnerships: over-indexing on what the district asks for at the expense of what will actually move outcomes. In D6, TM held the line on instructional rigor while remaining genuinely responsive to district priorities; the two goals reinforced rather than competed with each other.

Alignment From District to Classroom

Most coaching engagements operate at the school level. This partnership operated simultaneously at the district, school, and classroom levels—and kept those levels connected.

Principals were organized into clusters with coaches assigned consistently to each. A district liaison bridged TM coaches and district leadership. TM and D6 co-facilitated districtwide Assistant Principal Intervisitations aligned to the EL Implementation Tools, with protocols later adapted for Principal Cluster Intervisitations. Everyone understood the same vision, used the same language, and worked toward the same goals.



I remember myself going to the Teaching Matters coaches' meeting and setting expectations about the work—so that they could hear from me, the superintendent, where we were going. That's something that doesn't happen all the time."

— Renzo Martinez, Superintendent, District 6

Responsiveness to Feedback

As Ozier worked with D6, district leaders identified a need for greater consistency in the language and terminology coaches used to describe the work. Ozier helped strengthen that consistency, so district coaches, EL Education coaches and TM's own coaching work reinforced a common message. "Teaching Matters has been very welcoming in terms of making adjustments in real time, very quickly, when we provide feedback about what's happening in the field," Martinez said. That openness reflected the trust at the center of the partnership: district leaders and TM could collaborate candidly and strengthen the work together.

Building Toward Sustainability

D6 and TM designed the partnership in three explicit stages. Stage 1 (SY 2024-25) focused on laying the foundation by establishing the instructional vision, developing common tools, and building trust. Stage 2 (SY 2025-26) shifted to deepening implementation: moving from fidelity to integrity, strengthening monitoring and feedback systems, and building the capacity of district coaches alongside TM coaches. Stage 3 (SY 2026-27) is the horizon D6 is now approaching: a system where coaches, leaders, and teachers can sustain and improve practice without ongoing external support. The train-the-trainer structure was not an add-on but the engine of that progression.



What Teaching Matters and our collaboration did is we brought coaching out of the silo—so that everybody kept rising.”

— Renzo Martinez, Superintendent

Results That Matter

Teacher Practice

Teachers in D6 are leading more student-centered instruction—and the coaching model is why. Before this partnership, many teachers were implementing the EL Education curriculum with compliance rather than confidence: following the script, hitting the pacing, but not yet owning the instructional decisions. The shift from fidelity to integrity changed that. Teachers now plan backward from what students need to do, not from what the manual prescribes. Lesson launches are tighter, with clearly stated learning targets and criteria for success. Student engagement protocols are used with intention. Once sporadic, collaborative planning has become a consistent and purposeful routine across grade-level teams.

Instructional Leadership

The coaching didn't stop at the classroom door. Principals across D6 are now functioning as genuine instructional leaders—not just enabling coaching to happen in their buildings, but actively participating in it. Martinez described a principal who, through close work with a TM coach, developed the capacity to see good instruction, name it, and help it spread: “The coach not only coached the teachers, but also the principal.

**“The coach supported the development of the monitoring of the system.”
That shift matters at scale: when principals know what to look for and how to give feedback aligned to the same look-fors teachers are using, coherence compounds across a school rather than depending on individual coaching visits.**

Student Experience

The ultimate test is what students are experiencing and, by midyear, the answer was visible without needing to look at data. Walk into a D6 classroom and you see students doing the work: referencing texts to support their thinking, engaging in structured academic discussions, producing writing connected to what they've read, grappling with complex content rather than waiting for the teacher to explain it away.



There's a genuine desire to be collaborative. It's not like everything has come easily. But we're able to bring things to the front, talk about them, and reach consensus together.”

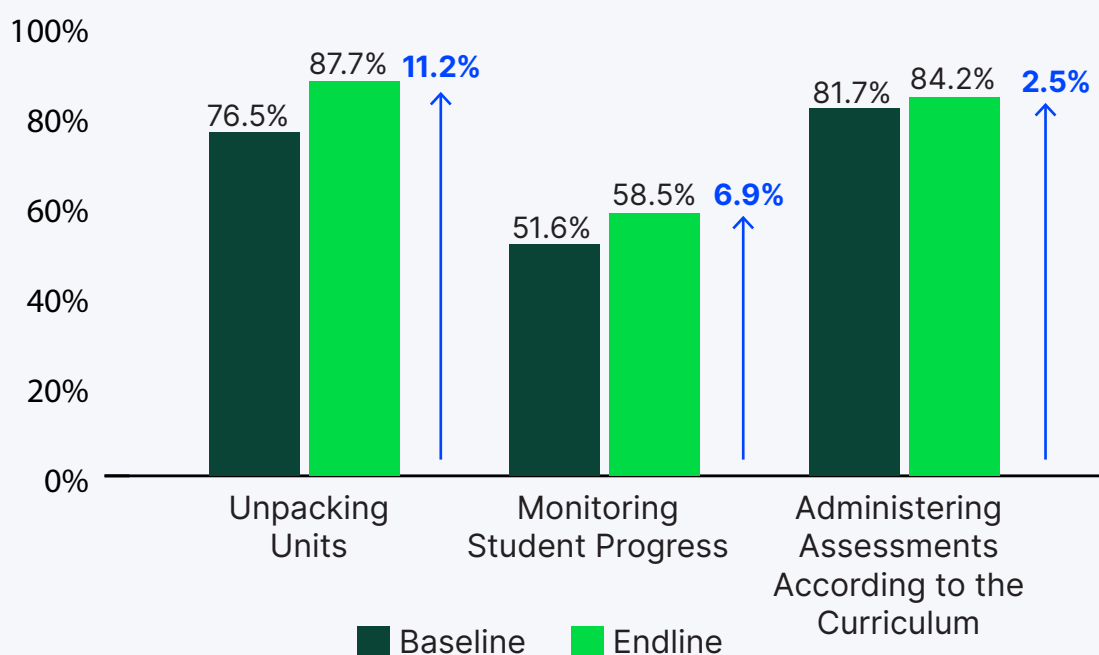
— Camille Wallin, Deputy Superintendent, D6

BY THE NUMBERS

District 6 saw measurable mid-year gains in NYC Reads benchmark data in Year 2 of implementation. Districts where Teaching Matters provided support demonstrated the highest NYC Reads outcomes among all supported districts citywide.

In the 2024-25 school year, D6 teachers demonstrated gains in effective instruction and student proficiency. Students gained 8.3 percentage points in ELA proficiency in a single year — rising from 40.4 percent to 48.7 percent of grades 3–5 students scoring proficient or above on the state assessment.

Change in % of D6 K-5 Teachers doing specific components of curriculum adoption “effectively”



When you walk into a classroom, you see more student ownership, more student-directed learning, more discussion. Teachers needed permission to step back and we gave them that permission, intentionally.”

— Camille Wallin, Deputy Superintendent, D6

The data confirmed what observation suggested: D6 saw measurable midyear benchmark gains, which Martinez attributed directly to the districtwide focus on students actively doing the cognitive work.

Lessons for District Leaders

D6 offers clear lessons for any district navigating large-scale curriculum adoption—particularly in the current environment of initiative fatigue, constrained budgets, and pressure to show outcomes quickly.

Coaching shortens the implementation dip

Large-scale curriculum adoption almost always produces a dip in instructional quality before it produces gains. Districts that treat implementation as a compliance problem get stuck in that dip. Districts that treat it as a learning problem and invest in job-embedded coaching to support teachers through the transition move faster. The side-by-side coaching model provided by TM didn't just train teachers on a new curriculum; it supported them through the hardest part of learning something new while responsible for a classroom.

Capacity assessment prevents one-size-fits-all rollout

Beginning with a structured capacity assessment rather than a pre-packaged plan ensures coaching is responsive to where each school is actually starting. This prevents the common failure mode where support is calibrated to an idealized school rather than the real one.

System-level alignment accelerates school-level change

The D6 model's most distinctive feature was its simultaneous operation across every level of the organization. When the superintendent, district coaches, TM coaches, and school liaisons are all working from the same vision and using the same language, schools move faster and further. The investment in monthly cross-system workshops was the engine of that alignment.

Design for sustainability from the start

District 6 didn't treat sustainability as an afterthought. By designing the partnership in explicit stages and embedding train-the-trainer structures from Year 1, the district ensured the work would outlast the formal engagement. The question every district leader should ask before entering a coaching partnership: What do we need to build so that this doesn't go away when the coaches do?

Ask what the partnership is actually building

Dollars spent on professional development and coaching are not equal. The D6 experience points to what makes the difference: a partner who co-creates rather than delivers; who adjusts in real time when feedback surfaces; who brings content expertise and local context together; and who is oriented toward building district capacity rather than deepening dependency. Those qualities are worth asking about directly before committing resources.