

Engaging Undergraduates through School Visits

One of the best ways to get students interested and involved in education reform is through a visit to a local high-performing, high-need school. These successful schools show that all children, regardless of race or background, are capable of achieving.

Why visit high-performing schools in underserved communities?

For too long, people have said that students in low-income areas can't achieve at the highest levels, but now we are seeing schools in high-poverty areas that are sending 90% or even more of their graduates to college. College students will be inspired to see that through hard work, high expectations, and a focus on great teachers and leaders, we can close the achievement gap.

What should participants know or be able to do after the visit?

- » Learn how to define the achievement gap, and describe how it might impact a low-income student's educational experience.
- » Identify the key elements of a gap-closing school: high expectations, great teachers and leaders, and a focus on student learning, strategies to involve parents and communities.
- » Hypothesize about district, state, or federal policies that might support the growth of more great schools or help failing schools become great.

Who should I invite to go on a school visit?

College students are more likely to stay invested and talking about the issues in education today if they can visit a school with a group of their friends, teammates, or classmates.

Who can help coordinate and fund a school visit?

Costs typically include only transportation and food.

- » Contact the community service chair of the student group you'd like to invite; see if the group will sponsor the visit.
- » Work with professors or administrators to arrange a visit for students in a particular academic department.
- » Partner with your student government or civic engagement center to create a workshop series that combines school visits with a deeper learning experience. For a big series like this, you might also pursue funding for reading materials, coffee & donuts in the morning, and posters to promote the visits.

How can I find gap-closing schools in my area?

- » Check out high-performing school networks like the [Knowledge Is Power Program](#), [Uncommon Schools](#), [Achievement First](#), [YES Prep](#), [Aspire](#), [Green Dot](#), [Mastery](#), [Noble Street](#), [Success Charter Network](#), [Democracy Prep](#), and more.
- » There may also be a successful turnaround school or magnet school in your area – talk to the Teach For America Recruitment Director on your campus for more information.

How should I schedule the visit?

- » Contact school administrators at the school you'd like to visit. Fridays often work well for both the school and college students.
- » If the school leader is receptive, ask if a teacher or leader might be available for a Q&A during lunch or a break.
- » Consider offering to do a short community service project while you are there.

What are the elements of a high-impact visit?

- » Make sure to solidify transportation plans. Print driving directions in advance, and allow for a full half hour buffer in case you are running late.
- » Prior to arriving at the school, conduct a discussion on the achievement gap – what is the current state of education in this country?
- » Sit-in on classes. Jot down a few notes on the lesson, student engagement, physical appearance of the classroom and school, and what is most surprising about your visit.
- » Conduct a Q & A with teachers and school leaders, if possible.
- » Discuss your observations and relevant articles – how can we scale up success?

How can participants get involved in education reform after the visit?

- » Point them to the [Action Center](#) on Teach For America's website.
- » Print a list of tutoring or volunteer groups on campus.
- » Encourage them to take summer internships in education reform.

Helpful Resources

- » Visit www.greatschools.org for information about schools in your area.
- » Check out our [list of recommended books and movies](#) about education reform.

For more information on our recruitment efforts or how to join the corps, visit www.teachforamerica.org.