

jkirn@bizjournals.com
 314-421-8392
 @stlbizjirn

EDUCATION

TEACH FOR AMERICA SHAKES UP PROGRAMMING

The nonprofit said it will no longer place new teachers in St. Louis, choosing to develop its 600 alumni in the area.



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Teach For America, the New York-based nonprofit that sends new graduates to teach in some of the country's most troubled schools, will no longer do so in the St. Louis market, saying that student achievement rates here have been disappointing.

Instead of sending new teachers to St. Louis, the organization said it will "deepen its investment" in its 600 alumni in the area in a continued bid to improve education outcomes.

"TFA believes that more experienced educational leaders are necessary to accelerate the pace of change for students," Elizabeth Bleier, interim executive director for TFA's St. Louis operations, said in a letter outlining the change. It was also signed by Maxine Clark and Dennis Hummel, both members of TFA's St. Louis board, and Greg Wendt, a former member of TFA's national board.

Part of the organization's strategy, Bleier's letter said, is to expand the impact and tenure of alumni principals and teachers. In an interview, she added that the organization's 10-year goal is to double the number of students achieving "academic college readiness metrics."

She also said the organization is deciding how it will support alumni of the program who are still teaching in the area, but that possibilities include profession-

al development, such as training teachers to move into administrative roles. It could also recruit other teachers who are alumni of the program to St. Louis schools, Bleier said, and will continue to offer training and support for current St. Louis teachers.

For the past year, TFA St. Louis had about 50 so-called "corps" members, or teachers in their first or second year, she said. Of the 600 alumni of the program in St. Louis, 300 remain in education as teachers and school leaders, including 22 principals.

"We very much see this as a smart pivot; we're not going anywhere," said Bleier, adding that the nonprofit's St. Louis staff of about seven would remain in place.

She said the organization is seeking a permanent executive director; Warren Morgan left that role last year.

St. Louis is among about a dozen TFA markets undergoing a similar change, Bleier said, and comes because there

hasn't been a dramatic increase in student achievement here. But St. Louis TFA teachers have performed as well or better than other first- and second-year teachers at similar schools, she said.

"TFA has had real impact in St. Louis for almost 20 years, and their alumni have achieved great success as education leaders, business leaders, elected officials and professionals serving our metro area – but students still don't have equitable access to the excellent educational opportunities they need to succeed," Bleier's letter said. "That hard truth has to be confronted, and not only here in St. Louis. We have profound inequity in our country, which stifles dreams and potential across generations, tears at our social fabric, and cuts against our core ideals as a country. In this context, we are defaulting on the most essential promise we make to our children – that regardless of race, income or social identity, they will have the opportunity to learn, lead and thrive."

"TFA believes that more experienced educational leaders are necessary to accelerate the pace of change for students."

ELIZABETH BLEIER, interim executive director of TFA St. Louis

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