

Don Reynolds: From Electrical Engineer to Senior Team Lead at West Generations Academy

During his first few months of college at the University of Colorado, Don Reynolds called his mother and told her he was going to switch his major from electrical engineering to education. "But she shot that down really quickly," Don said, laughing. "So, I did become an electrical engineer, but education is something that's been in my spirit for a long time."

After working as an engineer and a consultant, Don decided to return to his lifelong passion for teaching and learning, beginning as a substitute paraprofessional and gaining his teaching license through Denver Teaching Fellows.

Don is now a math teacher at West Early College, where he also serves in a [Teacher Leadership & Collaboration](#) role. As a [Senior Team Lead](#), he spends half his time teaching senior level precalculus and half his time supporting the five teachers on his team through coaching, collaborative team time and additional one-on-one supports. His role also involves being a member of his school's instructional leadership team, which focuses on data-driven instruction, professional learning, and ensuring observation and feedback are useful and actionable for teachers.

As Teacher Leader of the Year in 2015, it's clear Don has put a lot of effort and thought into what makes a good Senior Team Lead and how to help others grow. "I think the biggest lesson I learned last year was to ask more questions as opposed to thinking that you should have all the answers," he said.

Don believes strongly in working together with teachers to discover what areas of growth they should concentrate on and how they can achieve their goals. Don points out that building vital trust with teachers is about being able to convey, "I've been where you are. I'm still there, as well. And I would like to participate in collaborating with you as a support. I want to serve you to help you become a better teacher."

Don is first to say that many of his achievements have not been accomplished on his own. He cites the incredible training he's received, as well as support from his administration, Instructional Leadership Team and other teacher leaders at West.

He also points out that the LEAP framework has been a tremendous guide in developing his knowledge and understanding of good teaching. "I have experienced-teachers and new-teachers in varying content areas, but ultimately, good teaching is good teaching. A lot of the things that have helped me become a successful teacher are in the LEAP framework."

Even the best teacher leaders will encounter challenges, and Don is no exception. One of those challenges has involved developing an approach to coaching the teachers on his team that allows him to differentiate the support he is giving based on their readiness and needs. "All the things we



already know as teachers when we're dealing with students [also] apply to coaching adults," he said.

Balancing his teaching and Senior Team Lead duties can be difficult, as well. Developing efficient systems of organization and a clear set of classroom rituals and management have been invaluable to allowing Don to focus on what he loves most: helping both teachers and students learn and grow.

When Don thinks about his own leadership trajectory (he is a part of the [Executive Leadership for Successful Schools \(ELSS\)](#) program this year), he finds it impossible to separate the kind of principal he envisions himself being one day from the TLC distributive leadership model. "I will never have all the answers. I'll have really good questions, and I will be pushing my staff to understand that this is our school. The answer is in the room somewhere and very rarely is it going to come from me. It's going to come from all of us together."

To learn more about TLC and the various roles that come together to make it work, visit teacherleader.dpsk12.org.