



Scaling up teacher-led projects: Justin Minkel

In December 2014, Farmers Insurance awarded CTQ Collaboratory member and blogger Justin Minkel a \$100,000 Dream Big Challenge grant to create home libraries for 1,800 elementary school students and their families in Springdale, Arkansas. Over the next two years, children in Justin's community will receive 30,000 books to call their own in a program that more than 70 teachers will help to implement.

Links to explore

- [A visual story](#) of Justin's bold leadership from the classroom, made possible because of the learning and reach of the CTQ virtual community.
- In the final weeks of the Dream Big Challenge, Justin described some of [the supports that helped him scale up a good idea](#).
- Justin first made his project public in an article [published in Education Week Teacher](#) with editorial support from CTQ.

How CTQ supported Justin to take a great idea to scale



Justin created a home libraries project serving his classroom, conducting action research to gauge its impact. Soon after, he attended a **CTQ Rising Leaders retreat**, a teacher-designed and facilitated workshop created to accelerate development of leadership skills. The face-to-face retreat also served as a mechanism for boosting select teacher leaders' engagement with CTQ. Teachers tackled an independent leadership challenge (in Justin's case, the home libraries project).



At the retreat, Justin learned about **CTQ's support of teachers as writers**. With some editorial coaching, he wrote an article documenting his project, its impact, and how to replicate it for the Collaboratory column (then known as the Teacher Leaders Network column) on *Education Week Teacher*. Wildly successful, this article accumulated tens of thousands of page views and generated several dozen comments and email messages from educators who wanted to try it in their schools.

In his words...

"Without that first retreat I attended, I wouldn't have thought through the details of enlisting help to scale this kind of proposal," Justin told us in an email.

Without being encouraged to go public with his idea, Justin said, "I'd never have realized how much this home library idea resonates with all kinds of people, nor how easy it is to replicate."



Justin became increasingly active with CTQ as a **Collaboratory member**. He joined labs focusing on Common Core and global teacher leadership, and participated in webinar series (even leading some sessions) to develop teachers' knowledge and skills. He helped lead teacher retreats like the one he'd originally attended. Meanwhile, he collaborated with his teaching colleague Amber Stout to take the home libraries project schoolwide, involving 13 teachers and more than 250 students.



Justin, the 2007 Arkansas Teacher of the Year, came to our community as a strong communicator—but without much experience with blogging or social media. He refined his skills strategically by **learning from other Collaboratory members** in formal and informal settings. Through CTQ's partnership with GOOD, Justin wrote a second article about his project—this one targeting an audience of progressive non-educators—which led to additional inquiries. In 2013, CTQ began to support him as a contracted blogger; simultaneously, he began writing regularly for *Education Week Teacher*, whose editors discovered him via CTQ. His communications expertise—and well-networked Collaboratory colleagues—came in handy when he and Amber submitted a proposal to the Dream Big Challenge, in which winners were determined via online voting.

In his words...

As Justin put it, “Without the professional experiences I've had through CTQ, I'd still be thinking at a classroom level, maybe school level, rather than at a district/state/national level.”

“Without gaining some basic communications chops in tools like Twitter and blog posts, there is no way we'd have had the votes to surpass the Texas project there at the very end. People like Bill Ferriter, Brianna Crowley, and Val Brown selflessly used their networks of followers to promote this project, and it mattered tremendously to the outcome.”



“When it comes to taking teacher-led innovation to scale, it doesn't just take a village. It takes a national network... We can't do that [leadership] work in isolation. We sometimes need the brilliant colleague across the country just as much as we need our brilliant colleague across the hall.” —Justin Minkel