**GatesFoundation\_NicholasCybulski\_ElizaMoeller\_FINAL**

Eliza Moeller and her mentee Nicholas Cybulski talk about their evolution as educators and how they have changed to be more effective. Eliza is a Continuous Improvement Coach with the Network for College Success (NCS). Nicholas works with freshman students at a Chicago Public School (CPS).

**Nicholas:** I think back to when I first became a teacher. I applied to CPS, and my friends always said, “You know, that's going to be hard. They don't get the funding. There's a lot of inequities in this district.” I think that's why I do it. I need to fight for my kids, and I'm going to keep fighting for my kids as long as I'm a teacher and educator. Being a student, there weren't gay teachers. There weren't strong black teachers. There weren't Hispanic teachers. Now being here as an educator, you have so much diversity and the students feed off of that diversity. How about you? How did you get started with NCS?

**Eliza:** I was in research for a long time. And one of the biggest findings that has evolved over time and like really deepened and blossomed in the city is this idea that there’s these critical points in students' trajectories where it really matters if you get the supports right, if you get the instruction right. And the more the researchers dug into it, the more they found out that high school dropout happens because students didn't successfully transfer into high school in ninth grade. So if we want those end of high school outcomes to look right, we need to really get our work right in ninth grade. It's just been thrilling to watch educators take this problem in their hands and really just decide to solve it. Like we're the people who can change this. When did you start teaching freshmen and when did you start understanding that there's this particular kind of like freshman success work?

**Nicholas**: I taught middle school for three to four years, and I think that the relationships that you know how to develop with middle schoolers definitely bleed into high school, especially with the freshman class. And when my administration saw that you are kind of strong in this area at this grade level, they asked if I was interested in taking the lead with trying to help generate success for our freshmen.

**Eliza:** What do you think is the most important mindset shift you've made as a teacher?

**Nicholas**: I had to question my inherent biases, and I had to really dive into who I was as a person. And so when we as a team do that, the conversations are just amazing. Another thing is listening to what the students need and want is a huge shift that has helped me as an educator. These are human lives that have issues going on, and when you develop the relationships with the students, everything else will follow suit. And to me, when a student feels safe and able to talk to someone, then we did our job correctly.