

# Laurence Tan

## TEACH

The son of Filipino immigrants, Laurence Tan was studying to be a doctor when the vision of becoming a teacher presented itself in a dream. Now a fifth-grade teacher in Watts, California, Laurence uses the tool of TEACH to inspire and educate students in an area where opportunities are slim.

Laurence has also helped establish the [Watts Youth Collective](#) <sup>[1]</sup> with former students, an organization that promotes social change through media. Laurence's 12-hour teaching days and his work with the collective are efforts to produce positive changes in each individual and the community.

For ten years, Laurence has been a teacher in Watts. "My teaching is definitely informed by my experiences as an immigrant, because I don't approach my students as "those kids." Once you're in my class, you become part of my family." It is this style of TEACH--and perspective on life--that makes Laurence so effective in the classroom. By providing the opportunity for success and allowing the students to reach their potential, Laurence sees better results than what youth are used to: a strict, inside-the-box, "sit in your seat" authority.

Because of his initial inability to speak English, Laurence often felt like an outsider, but excelled in academics. In fact, before having the dream in which he was a teacher ("my epiphany?"), Laurence was planning on entering the medical profession. However, his vision was so powerful that he moved to Los Angeles to start work as an educator.

The students that typically enter Laurence's classroom, "have a lot of moments of people giving up on them, and [he doesn't] want to be added to that list." Due to this attitude, Laurence leaves his classroom open and is available to any student that needs help with homework after the school day ends. With 12-hour days the norm, one would not think Laurence would have any more time for himself, let alone his students, but with the Watts Youth Collective, he continues his work with youth.

The Watts Youth Collective began as simple meetings with alumni of Laurence's class. It has since grown into an organization that holds meetings, workshops, and produces creative works of art and nonfiction multimedia pieces, like "Watts Profiled," a documentary about racial profiling in the Watts area. WYC also allows youth to gather in a safe, secure place where they can feel comfortable being themselves and the support that Laurence provides is often unique in many of the member's lives. Drawing inspiration from his students and the tangible difference his efforts make is important to Laurence, so he plans to continue his work indefinitely.

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