

Developing and Supporting Opportunities for Teacher Leadership



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Introduction

Teacher leadership is the process by which expert educators take on roles at the classroom, school, district, state, or national levels to advance the profession, and improve educator effectiveness in order to increase access to great teaching and learning for all students.¹ To maximize teacher impact on student and school success, accomplished teachers must have defined opportunities to share their professional knowledge and expertise with colleagues. While teachers in some schools do participate in collaborative leadership activities, others work in isolation and have few opportunities to engage in conversations on ways to improve teaching and learning. It is the students who ultimately miss out on the benefit of shared knowledge. One way to increase collaboration is to establish systems of teacher leadership that formalize the sharing of expertise in order to promote professional learning throughout a school or district. Examples could include opportunities to leverage expertise by mentoring, peer observation and coaching, leading engagement with families and communities, and taking on responsibilities for curriculum or school improvement activities.

The emerging research base shows that teacher leadership has a positive impact on student learning. For example, a 2014 study found that supportive professional environments, particularly those where teachers have opportunities for peer collaboration, lead to increased teacher effectiveness and improved student outcomes.² Additionally, in 2015, the RAND Corporation found that one model of teacher leadership increased student achievement.³ States and districts continue to struggle with recruiting and retaining excellent teachers. Estimates for the national cost of teacher turnover run as high as \$7.3 billion. One reason for high teacher turnover is the lack of opportunities for teachers to grow and lead. The teacher turnover is even higher for teachers of color.⁴ The 2015 RAND study cited above also found teacher leadership had a positive impact on the retention of teachers who served in leadership roles.

A recent Center for Teaching Quality paper suggests that in order for teacher leadership opportunities to take hold, seven conditions must be in place: (1) a vision and strategy for teacher leadership; (2) supportive administrative

leadership; (3) appropriate and adequate human, fiscal, and physical resources; (4) enabling work structures; (5) supportive social norms and working relationships; (6) constructive organizational politics blurring roles of teaching and leading; and (7) a school- and system-wide orientation toward inquiry and risk taking.⁵ In addition, states and districts must ensure their teacher leadership systems include opportunities for teachers of color.

National and International Efforts to Grow Teacher Leadership Opportunities

There is growing momentum and interest across the country in using teacher leadership as a lever for improving student learning and teaching practice. Led by the U.S. Department of Education, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, ASCD, and more than 100 partner organizations, the Teach to Lead initiative seeks to initiate conversations among teachers and stakeholders at the federal, state, local, and school level on ways to build or strengthen models of teacher leadership.⁶ *The Teacher Leadership Initiative* (TLI), a partnership between the Center for Teaching Quality, the National Education Association, and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, is a comprehensive effort begun in 2013 to recruit, prepare, activate, and support the next generation of teachers to lead the profession.⁷ In 2011, a broad group of stakeholders developed the Teacher Leader Model Standards, including a consensus definition of a “teacher leader.”⁸ Organizations like the American Federation of Teachers and the National Network of State Teachers of the Year have also increasingly focused in recent years on ways to expand teacher leadership opportunities.⁹

Internationally, many countries have growing recognition that teachers need opportunities to lead and grow to best serve students. Education experts often point to Singapore as a model of teacher leadership. In Singapore, three distinct career paths exist that teachers may follow: master teacher, curriculum specialist, or school leader. Teachers receive a wide range of professional development and training opportunities regardless of the path they choose, and they progress to the next stage of their career based on their performance.¹⁰ Each of the paths receives similar compensation, and as a leader in one of these fields, teachers may earn as much as a principal.

¹ www.nnstoy.org/publications/great-to-influential/.

² Kraft, M.A. & Papay, J.P. (2014). Do supportive professional environments promote teacher development? Explaining heterogeneity in returns to teaching experience. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis.

³ www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1225.html

⁴ www.shankerinstitute.org/sites/shanker/files/The%20State%20of%20Teacher%20Diversity_0.pdf

⁵ Berry, B. (2016). Teacher leadership and deeper learning for all Students. Center for Teaching Quality. <http://www.teachingquality.org/deeperlearning>

⁶ www.teachtolead.org

⁷ www.teacherleadershipinitiative.org

⁸ www.teacherleaderstandards.org

⁹ AFT Teacher Leaders Program, www.teacherleadersprogram.net; NNSTOY (2016). Teacher career advancement initiatives: Lessons learned from eight case studies. http://www.nnstoy.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/RINVN829_Teacher-Career-Adv-Initiatives_Rpt_WEB_f.pdf

¹⁰ Curtis, Rachel (2013). Finding a New Way: Leveraging Teacher Leadership to Meet Unprecedented Demands, Aspen Institute Education and Society Program.

Teacher Leadership Initiative (TLI)

The Teacher Leadership Initiative is a partnership between the Center for Teaching Quality, the National Education Association, and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.



Erica Avent is a National Board Certified middle school science teacher in Oxford, Mississippi. She frequently leads professional development for her district and state and will begin a doctoral program at the University of Mississippi in fall 2016.

“The TLI experience has allowed me to connect with educators across the country to investigate problems at the local and national level, pursue association, instruction, and policy-based competencies, and generate a solution for a challenge in my local context. TLI made me face the fact that if I am frustrated with what is going on in education, I can’t escape the problems. I must advocate for changes myself. Before the initiative, I was a good teacher, but I believe that I am now uncovering more of my leadership potential. I am learning to look for solutions to the problems and peer issues that my students may be facing.

Before TLI, I had observed that the behavior of some of my male students had gotten out of hand. I knew these kids outside of school. They weren’t bad kids, but they were making some bad choices. So my capstone project centered on bringing in African-American male role models to help these young men examine their choices and how those choices impacted them as the men they wanted to become. The role models came to school and shared their life stories, finding a common ground with these young men that they hadn’t been able to find with their teachers.”

Strategies for Teacher Leadership

To expand teacher leadership opportunities, the Coalition for Teaching Quality recommends that federal, state and local leaders:

- A. Develop or strengthen systems of teacher leadership and career advancement,
- B. Support distributed leadership models, and
- C. Partner with nonprofits and institutions of higher education to strengthen teacher leadership development programs

A. Develop or strengthen systems of teacher leadership and career advancement.

The Coalition for Teaching Quality recommends that states and districts develop or strengthen systems of teacher leadership and career advancement that provide opportunities for teachers to use their professional expertise and knowledge to influence student learning, instructional practice and school improvement.

These systems of teacher leadership must include at least the following elements:

- Common planning time;
- Significant and sustainable compensation for teachers that serve in leadership roles;
- Training for teachers that agree to serve in leadership roles, which may include training on cultural competence and working with adult learners;
- Rigorous selection criteria for teachers in leadership roles, which may include Board-certification, a strong track record of improving student learning, and a proven ability to work with adult learners; and
- Diverse pool of teacher leader candidates.

States have also moved forward on teacher leadership policies. For example, in 2013, Iowa developed a Teacher Leadership and Compensation System designed to improve student achievement by strengthening instruction.¹¹ This initiative provides opportunities for teachers from across the state to collaborate and learn from one another and rewards effective teaching by providing pathways to increased leadership responsibilities and compensation.

B. Support Distributed Leadership Models.

The Coalition for Teaching Quality recommends that states and districts support a distributed leadership model whereby teachers and school leaders work together to take collective responsibility for student outcomes, school improvement and professional learning. This may include training and support for principals to develop and maintain school leadership teams that include teacher leaders.

C. Partner with and Draw on the Expertise of Innovative Teacher Leadership Development Programs.

To help build capacity, the Coalition for Teaching Quality recommends that states and districts partner with and draw on the expertise of national nonprofits and institutions of higher education implementing innovative teacher leadership development programs across the country.¹²

Playa del Rey Elementary School, Gilbert, Arizona

As a noted K-6 A+ School of Excellence awarded by the Arizona Educational Foundation and a designated Teach to Lead Lab School by the U.S. Department of Education, Playa del Rey Elementary School has earned its distinction by making important shifts in the school’s leadership structure. Serving a diverse population with forty-five percent of students qualifying for Title I services, and over 17 languages spoken by families as a designated refuge school, the teachers and principal took a comprehensive approach to transform to a distributed leadership model to address students’ educational challenges.

The transformation to a distributed leadership model required new conceptual and analytical tools that were implemented over several years, but began with the principal creating a trusting environment with staff and administration concentrating on doing what was in the best interests of the students and school

community. Teachers were encouraged to take risks

and bring ideas to their teams, where successes were celebrated and every contribution valued. Teachers and teacher leaders were encouraged to work in district-wide professional learning communities with colleagues to reorganize grade level departments to a more integrated organizational configuration from third through sixth grade. Both grade level and vertical articulation groups were created where teacher leaders and the entire leadership at the school developed an agreed-upon leadership matrix to align to the needs of the school community and eliminate hierarchical positions. Each leadership position, including teacher leaders, was defined so that the roles and responsibilities were widely understood and supported. Outcomes of the efforts included an increase in pathways and opportunities for teachers to exercise leadership; elevated teacher voice and influence in policy and practice; and expanded existing efforts to create a model for the field of effective teacher-led work.

Participating Organizations

National Organizations

- Alliance for Excellent Education
- Alliance for Multilingual Multicultural Education
- American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
- American Association of People with Disabilities
- American Association of State Colleges and Universities
- American Council for School Social Work
- American Council on Rural Special Education
- American Federation of Teachers
- The ARC
- ASPIRA Association
- Association of University Centers on Disabilities
- Autism National Committee
- Autistic Self Advocacy Network
- Center for Teaching Quality
- Citizen Action of New York
- Citizens for Effective Schools
- Coalition for Community Schools
- Communities for Excellent Public Schools
- Council for Exceptional Children

- Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates
- Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund Inc.
- Easter Seals
- Education Law Center
- Educators Rising
- FairTest, The National Center for Fair & Open Testing
- First Focus Campaign for Children
- Gamaliel Foundation
- Helen Keller National Center
- Higher Education Consortium for Special Education
- Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities
- Latino Elected and Appointed Officials
- Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
- Leadership for the Common Good
- League of United Latin American Citizens
- Learning Disabilities Association of America
- Movement Strategy Center
- NAACP
- NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.
- National Alliance of Black School Educators

¹¹ <https://www.educateiowa.gov/teacher-leadership-and-compensation-system>

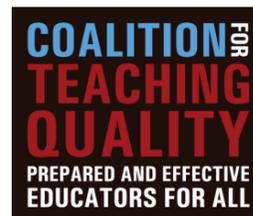
¹² For example, Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts, in partnership with NNSTOY, recently began offering a Master of Arts program in teacher leadership. [<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/professional-graduate/programs-teacher-leadership>]. Additionally, Teachers21 offers a Boston Teacher Leadership Certificate program to help teachers strengthen the skills they need for instructional leadership roles. [<http://www.teachers21.org/programs-and-courses/programs/teacher-leadership>].

Participating Organizations *(continued)*

National Association for the Education of Young Children	United Cerebral Palsy
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities	United Church of Christ Justice & Witness Ministries
National Association of Elementary School Principals	State and Local Organizations
National Association of School Psychologists	Abbott Leadership Institute, Newark, New Jersey
National Association of Secondary School Principals	Action Now, Illinois
National Association of State Directors of Special Education	Action Now, North Carolina
National Board for Professional Teaching Standards	ACTION United
National Center for Learning Disabilities	Alliance for Quality Education (AQE)
National Center on Deaf-Blindness	Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE)
National Commission on Teaching & America's Future	Arkansas Community Organizations
National Council for Educating Black Children	Bay Area Parent Leadership Action Network
National Council of Teachers of English	Brighton Park Neighborhood Council, Chicago
National Council of Teachers of Mathematics	California Association for Bilingual Education
National Disability Rights Network	California Latino School Boards Association
National Down Syndrome Congress	Californians for Justice
National Down Syndrome Society	Californians Together
National Education Association	Campaign for Quality Education
National Indian Education Association	Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning Coalition for Educational Justice
National Latino Education Research & Policy Project	Citizen Action of New York
National Network of State Teachers of the Year	Delawareans for Social and Economic Justice
National Opportunity to Learn Campaign	Educate Our State
National Urban League	Education Voters Pennsylvania
New Teacher Center	Grow Your Own Illinois
Opportunity Action	Inner City Struggle
Phi Delta Kappa International	Justice Matters
Parents Across America	Legal Advocates for Children and Youth
Partnership for 21st Century Skills	Montgomery County Education Forum
Progressive States Action	Parent-U-Turn
Public Advocacy for Kids	Parents for Unity
Public Advocates Inc.	RYSE Center
Rural School and Community Trust	San Francisco Teacher Residency
School Social Work Association of America	Texas Association of Chicanos in Higher Education
South East Asia Resource Action Center	Young Voices Providence, Rhode Island
TASH - Equity, Opportunity, and Inclusion for People with Disabilities	Youth On Board, Somerville, Massachusetts
Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children	Youth Together
TESOL International Association	

About the Coalition for Teaching Quality

The Coalition for Teaching Quality represents a broad cross-section of more than 100 local, state, and national organizations representing civil rights, disability, parent, student, community, and education groups. Formed in reaction to a provision of federal law that allowed teachers in training to be identified as “highly qualified” and concentrated in low-income, high-need schools with diverse learners, this group has developed a new, comprehensive framework for teaching quality that will allow the nation to put a fully prepared and effective educator in every classroom.





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