



Literature Review and Best Practices
on Teacher Leadership

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MOVING EDUCATION FORWARD



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APPROACH

This literature review was requested in 2015 by the Eagle County Schools (ECS) as part of the work of the ECS Teacher Leadership Committee (TLC) supported by Battelle for Kids (BFK). The purpose of this review is educational. It is meant to provide the current landscape of teacher leadership with an emphasis in practical approaches to teacher leadership nationally and internationally. This literature review is intended to provide a springboard for discussion, expand perspectives, and fuel ideation.

TLC members were invited to participate in the process of selecting and reviewing literature. Additionally, teaching and administrative faculty of ECS were invited to suggest literature to be considered. Literature included in the review has been made available to all ECS staff members on the district's internal SharePoint site. Twelve TLC members participated in the reading and review of the literature as well as BFK staff. An online Smart Sheet form was established to support the critical analysis of the literature prompting reviewers to identify the following aspects: context, model description, benefits to students, benefits to others, general drawbacks, cost implications, research methodology, and research findings. Practitioner, scholarly, and advocacy literature was included in the review process. BFK led the review of the advocacy and scholarly literature and provides the written synthesis that follows.

This review is organized to first provide readers with an understanding of teacher leadership and the many purposes and forms teacher leadership can take. The review then moves into approaches and models for teacher leadership that have been implemented nationally and internationally. Knowing that teacher leadership needs to be cultivated and supported, the review then describes the characteristics and competencies of effective teacher leadership, the conditions for success, and recommendations for moving forward.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is Teacher Leadership?

Teacher leadership, in an informal sense, has existed perhaps as long as the teaching profession itself. Going above and beyond to support their school community is inherently at the core of many teachers' practice. With this in mind, school systems, policymakers, researchers, and professional organizations across the country have begun exploring ways to formalize the concept with the goals of recognizing, facilitating, and learning from the leadership many teachers already demonstrate in their schools.

Fullan and Hargreaves define teacher leadership as the "capacity and commitment to contribute beyond one's classroom" (p. 13). Curtis (2013) offers an expanded definition, noting that teacher leadership involves, "specific roles and responsibilities that recognize the talents of the most effective teachers and deploy them in service of student learning, adult learning and collaboration, and school and system improvement" (p. iii). Teacher leadership is defined in multiple ways usually determined by the context in which it lives. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) attempt to demystify teacher leadership by providing a series of assumptions to be considered in an effort to form a more precise definition, including:

1. All teachers versus select teachers;
2. Either formal or informal leadership versus both formal and informal leadership;
3. Classroom-based versus administration-based leadership;
4. Primary focus on teaching and learning versus primary focus on organizational issues;
5. Responsibility for outcomes versus powerlessness;
6. Leaders are born versus leadership can be learned;
7. Results-driven quality professional development versus disconnected staff development workshops; and
8. Reflective teacher as professional versus teacher as technician (pp.35-38).

These assumptions are driving tensions that influence the definition and understanding of teacher leadership. A general definition broadly cited and accepted for teacher leadership is individuals who "lead within and beyond the classroom; identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders; influence others toward improved educational practice; and accept responsibility for achieving the outcomes of their leadership" (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009, p. 6).

Rationale for Teacher Leadership

The rationale for teacher leadership stems in part from extensive research highlighting the profound impact effective instruction has on student learning (Taylor, 2008). As Curtis (2013) argues, school systems must leverage this impact, putting the most effective teachers "in front of the greatest number of students or the students with the greatest learning needs" (p. iii). Teacher leadership opportunities enable career pathways (ladders, lattices) for teachers to remain highly engaged in their practice and extend their influence, especially in high-needs schools. An especially powerful recruitment and retention tool, teacher leadership opportunities have been shown to double the percentage of teachers who would choose to work in a low-performing school (TNTP, 2012).

The Aspen Institute, in partnership with Leading Educators, joined forces to develop a roadmap to teacher leadership called, *Leading from the Front of the Classroom* (2014). The foundation

for this roadmap is the idea that the form teacher leadership takes should match its function. Determining the function should be the first step. Function means that, “teacher leadership initiatives are not created for their own sake, but are designed to advance other pressing priorities,” while form means that, “teacher leadership roles are clearly defined, with sufficient time, support, and resources to be effective” (The Aspen Institute, 2014, p. 3). The authors argue for a shift in school culture, making a case for the redistribution of leadership tasks to teachers. The strategy, aimed at teacher retention, offers teachers opportunities to participate in more leadership activities, thereby increasing their potential to move up the career ladder and ease the workload of the school principal. Profiles of innovative initiatives at school, district, and state levels are included. This roadmap outlines a process for the creation of a teacher leadership system and includes: design for impact (purpose), know your context (challenges and opportunities), define the measures (define success and how to measure), and build strategically (clear roles and responsibilities). This roadmap is a backwards design process that enables systems to examine the challenge of identifying and cultivating the conditions under which teacher leadership can be most effective for both individuals and the system.

Another body of research that provides a rationale for teacher leadership involves professional and teacher development. Studies indicate that the most effective professional development for teachers is focused on instructional matters, involves collaboration sustained over time, and is job-embedded (Hawley, 1999). Teacher leaders may be the best equipped to address these criteria through coaching and customized support, thereby offering “a more direct path to improving teachers’ practice” (Stoelinga, 2008, p. 184).

Teacher leaders can benefit their school in many other ways, such as by supervising and supporting others, making instructional or staffing decisions, or assuming other managerial roles. In doing so, they can ease principals’ burden (Curtis, 2013) while also helping to build a natural pipeline to the principalship. A recent report from the Center for Teaching Quality, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and the National Education Association (2014) also emphasizes teacher leaders’ potential to expand their reach beyond school walls by informing decisions about education policy and practice within their district and beyond.

In addition to the benefits of teacher leadership for schools and districts, the dual role of teaching and leading can be personally and professionally rewarding, when coupled with support from the school’s administration. This hybrid role allows teacher leaders to “improve their teaching, foster meaningful collaboration, increase their independence and flexibility, learn new skills, and see the big picture of the school district” (Owens, 2015, p. 150).

With respect to specific roles, Bell et al. (2011) outline a number of possible assignments for teacher leaders, including instructional coach, mentor, curriculum designer, department head, grade-level chair, professional development coordinator, and technology coordinator. Regardless of the roles teacher leaders assume, Curtis (2013) and others stress the importance of offering high-performing teachers with career advancement opportunities “that both elevate the profession and enable them to have the greatest impact on colleagues and students” (p. iii).

Teacher Leadership Models

Although some people will argue that “effective teaching is leadership” (Collay, 2013, p. 72), and that all teachers are leaders, there are more specifically defined and formalized roles that teacher leaders assume inside and outside of the classroom. Given that formal teacher leadership is still an emerging practice, there is very little research to aid in the development of best practices or theoretical frameworks. However, some studies highlight certain factors that should be considered when designing teacher leadership programs. For instance, Bell et al.

(2011) suggest that teachers who are taken out of the classroom full-time to occupy leadership positions “tend to lose credibility with those who remain teaching in the classroom” (p. 63). As such, the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium (2011) recommends: the creation of hybrid roles for teachers where they can remain in their classrooms at least part of the time, the promotion of shared or distributed leadership structures, and the provision of common planning time, job-embedded professional development opportunities, and release time.

While the lack of standardized models or frameworks for teacher leadership may pose certain challenges, it also offers districts a unique opportunity to develop programs that address their specific goals and values. For instance, leadership roles can be designed to reflect organizational priorities like: collaboration, shared accountability, continuous improvement, greater capacity for differentiated instruction, or increasing the number of students that highly effective teachers reach. Additionally, locally-developed systems can account for factors like a district’s culture, capacity, and stakeholder attitudes (Curtis, 2013). Thus, as McBee (2015) posits, “It is the informality of the teacher leader role that makes it work” (p. 19).

To meet local needs, many school systems have developed their teacher leadership programs using “multiple approaches and multiple definitions for the practice” (Bell et al., 2011, p. 58). For example, Singapore’s model—including pathways for master teachers, curriculum specialists, and school leaders—arose in response to teacher shortages and low education quality. Similarly, the District of Columbia Public Schools and the Achievement First Charter Schools network created systems of career advancement, professional development, and increased recognition and compensation to attract talented teachers and encourage them to stay in the classroom. Denver Public Schools’ goal for teacher leadership was to increase teachers’ capacity to drive student success by having the most effective teachers support their colleagues (Curtis, 2013). California’s Long Beach Unified School District—identified in Battelle for Kids’ Global Education Study (2012) as a sustained improver based on multiple national and international assessments—also focused on professional development when designing leadership opportunities for teachers. Specifically, the district relies heavily on internally-led professional development, including instructional coaches who assess and inform their peers’ classroom instruction.

The Center for American Progress recently studied a diverse set of leading districts in the United States that provide opportunities for teacher input in the decision-making process in Common Core implementation (Amore, Hoeflich, & Pennington, 2015). Through interviews and observations, their research found that similar types of teacher leadership opportunities are available in each district. These opportunities include: teachers involved in district- and school-level governance, teachers on special assignment, and teachers in leadership roles who still actively practice in the classroom (p.2). As a result of these teacher leadership opportunities, teachers identified they were able to have a positive impact on professional development (directing their own professional learning), time for collaboration (more control on how to best use collaboration time), and writing, developing, and choosing instructional materials. Relative to teacher leadership, the Center for American Progress recommends to districts implementing new standards that teacher leadership roles be created at the classroom, school, and district levels. More particularly, their findings indicate that district leaders should “guard against taking them [teacher leaders] out of the classroom completely” and that “hybrid teacher leadership positions and teacher special-assignment positions are worth considering” (Amore, Hoeflich, & Pennington, 2015, p. 25).

From these examples and others, three general categories of teacher leadership emerge: 1) every teacher is a leader, 2) the teacher leader as a formal role, and 3) a combination or

hybrid role (Amore, Hoeflich, & Pennington, 2015; Bell, Thacker, & Schargel, 2011; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Additionally, new teacher leadership practices are being implemented that extend the reach of excellent teachers to more students (Public Impact, 2012). In the following sections, teacher leadership models in each of these three categories will be described and illustrated as well as a section on extended reach models.

Models: Every Teacher a Leader

The *Instructional Rounds* model enables all teachers to participate in the study of instructional practices at their school. Educators form small teams who visit multiple classrooms to understand what is happening school-wide relative to a problem of practice. The teachers and administrators who observe classrooms, collect data, analyze data, and plan for next steps are actively learning how to improve their own practice. The effect of instructional rounds is a collegial, reflective process where all involved parties are learning how to best serve the students at their school (City, 2011). A skilled facilitator for instructional rounds is required and should be from outside the school to remove bias. Teacher participation can rotate to expand opportunities and grow perspective. Educators are able to engage in professional dialogue about teaching and learning and to learn from colleagues by seeing them in action and through the reflective inquiry process. As a faculty unites around a common problem of practice, professional learning becomes more focused and shared ownership for student learning and improved practice emerges.

The *Collaborative Action Research* model is driven by teacher inquiry and supported by a professional learning community structure where the action research projects are developed, nurtured, and shared. All teachers are resources to their peers as they collectively travel this journey of teacher inquiry. As teachers develop the habit of seeking the advice of their peers, they become more receptive to the idea of garnering feedback from their students and responding to their needs (Cody, 2013). All teachers are trained in the process of action research and they self-facilitate using a variety of protocols. All teachers assume leadership roles and are willing to follow their peers when they see it as beneficial to their practice.

Models: The Teacher Leader as a Formal Role

The *Partnership Approach to Instructional Coaching* (Knight, 2011) is a formal teacher leadership model where the teacher and coach work in an equal partnership to collect data, reflect on and analyze data, set goals, make plans for instruction, and refine teaching practice for the benefit of the students. Instructional coaches are formally trained to support teacher learning through these coaching practices: enroll teachers, identify goals, listen, ask questions, explain teaching practices, model, and provide feedback (pp. 21-22). One distinguishing characteristic of this model of instructional coaching is that the teacher is the final decision-maker. They set goals for themselves and drive their own learning. Both parties learn from the interaction, feel valued, and have choice. Teacher leaders do not have predetermined collections of strategies that are imposed on teachers. Both the teacher and coach have collaboratively grown their practice through ongoing reflection.

The *Strengths-based Coaching* model (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011) requires the coach to be released from teaching responsibility so s/he has time to meet with, observe, and facilitate individual teacher professional development. The teacher leader is a coach who works with teachers in a “teacher-centered, no-fault, strengths-based approach to improve teacher effectiveness” (p. 16). There is a clear delineation between the roles of coach and evaluator. Evaluation is left to the principal so the teacher leader can tap into and celebrate competencies rather than document deficiencies. The teacher leaders build a high-trust connection to free up the teacher to take on new challenges. Teachers are able to clarify what

they want and need, build on their strengths, and experiment which empowers them to take more initiative and responsibility for their own learning. In this model, coaching “can increase teacher professionalism and raise the bar of teacher effectiveness to a continuous and collective striving for excellence” (p. 10).

The *Content Specialist* model provides content knowledge and content pedagogical expertise to teachers who teach a specific content area. Content specialists are often referred to as literacy coaches, math coaches, ELL specialists, etc. When a teacher leader specializes in a content area, s/he can provide increased depth of resource and knowledge. Typical content specialists practice focused walkthroughs, facilitate content-based team meetings, provide formal one-on-one coaching, analyze formative and summative data, and meet regularly with the principal (Hanson, 2011). A content specialist can provide focused support aligned to a school’s or a district’s academic goals. In a study of reading coaches in 113 schools in Florida, researchers found that student achievement improved when coaches worked with teachers to respond to data with teaching strategies and increased teachers’ content knowledge relative to where the students struggled (Marsh, McCombs, & Martorell, 2010). A major focus for content specialists is on analyzing data to guide practice including providing data support to teachers.

The *Lesson Demonstration Coach* model supports the learning of all teachers, but pays particular attention to the needs of new teachers. Demonstration lessons are modeled by the coach either live (with the teacher’s students) or through video-recorded lessons of the coach teaching a strategy in several different classrooms. The strategies modeled are requested by the classroom teacher and align to the clearly defined shared vision of good teaching in the school. During the observation process, the teacher assumes the role of learner and takes notes using an observation form to document the coach’s teaching moves. The teachers are part of a learning community right in their own classroom (Casey, 2011). When using video-recorded lessons, the coach and teacher can observe together increasing the opportunities for interpretation and reflection.

The *Virtual Coaching* model allows the teacher leader to be connected to the teacher and his/her classroom through virtual tools (e.g., Skype) using a camera to observe in real time and provide immediate feedback through an earpiece the teacher is wearing. Versatility is a key feature of this model (Rock, Zigmond, Gregg, & Gable, 2011) since the coach can be in a remote location and serve teachers in multiple locations (within the district and across multiple districts). Brief, positive feedback is emphasized in this model. Since teacher feedback is in real-time, mid-course instructional corrections can be made to strengthen the learning experience for students. Coaches are able to record instruction and use the video as a tool for debriefing and reflection with the teacher.

Models: Combination or Hybrid

The *Teacher Turnaround Teams* (T3) model created by Teach Plus and implemented in chronically low-performing schools in Boston and the District of Columbia Public Schools is a combination model allowing teacher leaders to remain in the classroom and facilitate the learning of their colleagues. In these schools, 20-25 percent of the teachers are trained to lead and provide ongoing support to their colleagues through structured collaboration time. They receive additional compensation for their leadership role and are viewed by their peers as “more effective and having the knowledge and skills to help others improve” (Coggins & McGovern, 2014, p. 19). Teacher leaders work with teams of teachers to examine and respond to data. They create and implement action plans, collect evidence, and share accountability for moving student learning forward. This leadership opportunity “attracts high performing teachers to low performing schools” (p. 16) and retains teachers in the profession (p. 18). Additional benefits

include the pairing of high needs students with the most effective teachers, improved collegial work climate and school culture, and the removal of “turnaround” as the school status.

The *Peer Coaching* model provides teacher leadership opportunities for the strongest teachers to work weekly with one or two peers and maintain a full or minimally reduced teaching load (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2013). Teacher leaders are released from additional duties and may have their course load reduced to accommodate the additional responsibility of peer coaching. Peer coaches observe a teacher, meet with the principal to plan and role-play the feedback session, and then provide “bite-size” (p. 48) feedback to the teacher every week. Principals work closely with peer coaches to strengthen their feedback process. Peer coaching is a form of distributed instructional leadership that is supported not only by school administrators, but by district leaders as well. Peer coaches receive feedback on their feedback at district-wide learning sessions so they continue to grow in their adult learning strategies. Other distinguishing features of this model include the narrow focus of feedback provided to the teacher (e.g., What one action can the teacher take this week to make students more successful?) and the implementation cycle of ongoing practice and feedback.

Models: Extended Reach

Extended Reach models have been developed by Public Impact (2012) and can be found in their body of work referred to as Opportunity Culture. They have developed more than 20 Extended Reach models designed to enable excellent teachers to reach many more students and help all teachers improve and contribute to excellence. There are five principles when creating an Opportunity Culture: 1) reach more students with excellent teachers and their teams; 2) pay teachers more for extending their reach; 3) fund pay within regular budgets; 4) provide protected in-school time and clarity about how to use it for planning, collaboration, and development; and 5) match authority and accountability to each person’s responsibilities (p. 1). The 20 extended reach models fall into four major categories. Descriptions of these four categories are as follows:

Multi-Classroom Leadership

“School-based or remotely located instructional teams report to excellent teachers with leadership skills. The teacher-leaders are fully accountable for multiple classrooms, and they both teach and lead other team members, who use the leader’s methods and tools in varying roles the leader assigns” (Public Impact, 2012, p. 3). The teacher leader earns more than the other teachers and has a quasi-administrative role in which s/he is responsible for choosing, evaluating, and developing team members.

Specialization

“Excellent teachers specialize in high-priority subjects and the most crucial, challenging roles, focusing on the subjects and instructional roles in which each excels” (Public Impact, 2012, p. 3). Again, this model can be implemented in-person or remotely and can be a subject specialization (literacy, math, science, etc.) or role specialization (academic instruction and planning, small group instruction, etc.). The subject specialization teacher leaders are teaching only one or two priority subjects, leaving other subjects and many non-instructional tasks to teammates or assistants. School priorities and teacher availability are influencing factors with this model. The role specialization teacher leader focuses his/her time on the instructional roles that are most challenging and critical for success and that align to his/her strengths. Other staff or technology solutions are used to reduce the non-instructional tasks.

Class-Size Changes

“Excellent teachers choose to teach larger classes, within limits appropriate for each teacher, the students, and each school” (Public Impact, 2012, p. 5). When class size is increased for excellent teachers, it is recommended that class size is limited to 35, but each school determines its own boundaries. Although teacher leaders are extending their reach to more students, they are not impacting their colleagues or working with a team approach. When a class size is shifted, students shift into classes of teachers who have consistently achieved excellent outcomes in select subjects. Class size increases and class size shifting can be accomplished remotely, as well as in person.

Time-Technology Swaps

“Digital instruction replaces enough excellent in-person or remotely-located teacher time that these teachers can teach more students. Students are likely to use digital instruction for 25 percent or more of learning time. The swap may be on a fixed schedule (rotation) or a flexible one (flex) determined by students’ changing needs” (Public Impact, 2012, p. 6). This blended learning approach to maximize the impact and reach of excellent teachers can be done with the teacher face-to-face or teaching students remotely. If teacher leaders are remotely located, instructional assistants are needed to monitor students and attend to non-instructional duties.

The Extended Reach models presented here do not represent an exhaustive list, but they do provide a wide variety of approaches to consider as a springboard for design consideration. Over time, less rigid approaches to teacher leadership have been developed in an effort to be responsive to contextual needs. What do students in this particular school need in order to maximize their learning? What do teachers in this particular school need to maximize their instructional practice? Personalization and customization are dominant priorities in educational systems today. These priorities also influence approaches to teacher leadership.

The Aspen Institute’s research on teacher leadership examined the various approaches that have been taken to systemically structure teacher leadership to meet the demands placed on educators today (Curtis, 2013). There is no one right way to approach teacher leadership. One of the main take-aways from this overview addresses the importance of the development of a system for teacher leadership. Each context is different, therefore the purpose and practice of teacher leadership will be different. Systems need to create space for innovation while pursuing incremental systemic change that removes the barriers to innovation in differentiated teaching roles, instructional delivery, and aligned incentives (Curtis, 2013, p. iv).

International Teacher Leadership

Just as teacher leadership models across the United States vary in structure and approach, so do the models implemented around the world. For instance, teachers in Singapore choose between three career tracks—a Teaching Track focused on instruction, a Leadership Track for aspiring principals and department heads, and Specialist Track that cultivates expertise in research or curriculum development (Owens, 2015). In contrast, New Zealand employs a distributed leadership model in which teachers, students, and administrators share various responsibilities within their school (Owens, 2015).

Despite these differences, the highest-ranked countries based on international measures of student achievement (e.g., the Programme for International Student Assessment) have several commonalities that offer insight into the practices and conditions needed to sustain teacher leadership. Specifically, high-performing school systems consistently select top talent, empower teachers to grow professionally, and make strategically aligned logistical decisions that facilitate teacher leadership.

Selection

The high-quality teacher workforce in top-performing countries naturally lends itself to career advancement systems that allow educators to develop and demonstrate their range of talents. Selective criteria for entry into the profession ensure that the best possible candidates are hired for teaching positions. For example, teachers in Finland, Hong Kong, and Singapore come from the top 10, 18, and 30 percent of their college cohort, respectively (Battelle for Kids, 2012). These competitive selection processes highlight the power of well-designed hiring practices to yield long-term benefits for teachers and school systems.

Professional Growth

Ongoing, job-embedded professional development is another priority in successful education systems around the world. Teachers in Singapore receive formative evaluations, as well as over 100 hours of professional development each year, with an emphasis on content mastery so they can deepen their expertise in the subjects they teach (Owens, 2015). In addition, they enjoy the flexibility to choose professional development topics that most closely align with their needs and interests (Mourshed, Chijoke, & Barber, 2010).

Teachers in the United States spend 80 percent of their workday directly interacting with students, compared to 60 percent in other industrialized countries (Darling-Hammond, Chung Wei, & Andree, August 2010). That leaves them less time to analyze data, plan instruction, and collaborate with colleagues, all activities that research ties to improvement in instruction and student outcomes (Reeves, 2003). Collaboration is a central component of professional development in many countries. In Denmark, Finland, Italy, and Norway, teachers support each other's professional growth by engaging in collaborative research projects. Similarly, Japanese teachers participate in research lessons where they take turns implementing instructional best practices during lessons with students, recording the lessons, and working with colleagues to analyze and improve upon their techniques (Darling-Hammond, Wei, & Andree, 2010). In New Zealand, a "cluster model" is used to group similar schools and allow educators from those schools to connect and share ideas (Owens, 2015).

Novice teachers in high-performing countries receive even more support through induction programs that offer customized professional development and mentoring, as well as a reduced teaching load. Mentor teachers in countries such as England, France, Israel, Singapore, and Switzerland receive formal training to help ensure success in their leadership roles. In Norway, teacher education institutions not only train mentors, but take part in providing direct support to new teachers in the schools. Additionally, first-year teachers in New Zealand receive 20 percent release time, and second-year teachers receive 10 percent release time to "observe other teachers, attend professional development activities, work on curriculum, and attend courses" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010, p. 2).

In addition to formal professional development activities, teachers often enjoy high levels of autonomy, which allows them additional opportunities to hone their leadership skills. For instance, teachers in Finland regularly work alongside administrators to establish policies, develop curricula and assessments, select textbooks, set budgets, and plan professional development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010).

Strategic Alignment

Perhaps equally important to the aforementioned practices is the evidence that successful school systems across the world integrate these practices into their daily operations, rather than treating them as ancillary or stand-alone programs. For instance, teachers in European and

Asian nations spend approximately 15–25 hours per week on collaborative planning, analyzing lessons, observing lessons, and other tasks related to teaching. In the U.S., teachers are generally given around three to five hours to complete similar tasks (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010). Teacher-led inquiry processes focused on identifying and collectively addressing problems of practice also are routine occurrences. Some school systems arrange their physical spaces in ways that facilitate collaboration and teacher leadership, with shared offices where teachers regularly work together. Finally, teacher involvement in school management and decision making is an established norm in countries like Finland (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010). In essence, a culture of collaboration and autonomy is woven into the fabric of these school systems such that teacher leadership emerges as a part of a natural progression of professional growth.

Recommendations

Recommendations that could inform programs and practices in the United States based on the study of international teacher leadership and development include:

- Improving recruitment and selection practices as needed to hire top talent;
- Offering mentoring for all beginning teachers by trained mentors;
- Enabling shared collaboration time and in-classroom coaching;
- Providing teachers sufficient time to engage in collective curriculum planning, analysis of student work, and job-embedded professional learning;
- Allocating time and resources for regular professional learning opportunities supported by trained coaches and mentors and linked to the content teachers teach and the standards students are expected to meet;
- Establishing a system in which new teachers have a reduced work load and gradually assume more responsibilities; and
- Regularly involving teachers in school-level decision making.

Teacher Leader Characteristics and Competencies

As national interest in teacher leadership grows, researchers and policy organizations have been working to clarify and conceptualize it by addressing the question, “What should teacher leaders know and be able to do?” Through their efforts, several guidelines and themes have emerged that can be instrumental in identifying potential teacher leaders and supporting them in their new role.

Research findings highlight characteristics of successful teacher leaders, which should be considered during the selection and placement processes: experience, dispositions, personal and ethical behaviors, relational behaviors, and content and curricular knowledge (Gordon, Jacobs, & Solis, 2013). One caution in regard to the selection of teacher leaders is to not create an out-group by selecting an in-group (Angelle & DeHart, 2001). Teacher leaders need to be strongly affiliated with and connected to the teachers they support. When teacher leaders are selected who are seen as the principal’s confidante or part of the ‘in group’, they will struggle building trusting relationships with colleagues.

Even in the absence of formal teacher leadership programs, leadership in schools often emerges organically as teachers demonstrate excellence and gain the respect and trust of their peers. The Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium (2011) notes:

Teachers become leaders in their schools by being respected by their peers, being continuous learners, being approachable, and using group skills and influence to

improve the educational practice of their peers. They model effective practices, exercise their influence in formal and informal contexts, and support collaborative team structures within their schools (p. 11).

In addition to those qualities, Leading Educators (2015) outlines several core values that effective teacher leaders should espouse, including:

- *Equity*: Having a belief in all children’s abilities, and challenging inequity;
- *Service*: Listening and seeking to understand others, and working to address student needs;
- *Community*: Supporting, celebrating, challenging, and collaborating with colleagues;
- *Growth*: Developing oneself and others, identifying one’s limitations, and seeking opportunities to leverage strengths and develop growth areas; and
- *Results*: Demonstrating diligence, high expectations, commitment, and personal responsibility.

For teacher leaders to have a greater impact on student learning, Leading Educators’ research suggests three strategies for teacher leaders: 1) develop their priorities aligned to school priorities and set clear, measurable goals; 2) identify a clear, cohesive team to support; and 3) develop a carefully-planned and agreed-upon schedule with administration to ensure enough time and opportunity to perform leadership responsibilities (2015). For example, participants in Leading Educators’ research study (teacher leaders, leadership coaches, and principals) identified goal setting as the highest-leverage teacher leader behavior, especially when aligned to school and system goals. Through the process of analyzing their progress toward student goals, momentum was built and maintained. Teacher leaders with clear goals and purpose are able to respond to emerging needs without getting off track.

Organizations like Leading Educators, the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, the Center for Teaching Quality, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and the National Education Association have expanded these general attributes to outline specific competencies—knowledge, skills, and abilities—that teacher leaders need to succeed. For instance, the Teacher Leader Competency Framework (Leading Educators, 2015) includes 15 competencies organized into four overarching “pillars”: 1) developing self, 2) coaching others, 3) leading teams, and 4) driving initiatives.

The Teacher Leader Model Standards (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2011) reflect a similar approach, comprising seven domains that describe the many dimensions of teacher leadership: 1) fostering a collaborative culture to support educator development and student learning; 2) accessing and using research to improve practice and student learning; 3) promoting professional learning for continuous improvement; 4) facilitating improvements in instruction and student learning; 5) promoting the use of assessments and data for school and district improvement; 6) improving outreach and collaboration with families and community; and 7) advocating for student learning and the profession.

Finally, the Center for Teaching Quality, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and National Education Association (2014) outline competencies for three specific types of leadership roles—instructional, policy, and association leadership—as well as overarching competencies that apply to all three groups, including:

- *Instructional*: Coaching/mentoring, collaboration/relationships, community;
- *Policy*: Implementation, advocacy, policy making, and engagement;

- *Association*: Leading with vision, leading with skill, organizing/advocacy, building capacity, and community/culture;
- *All Teacher Leaders*: Reflective practice, personal effectiveness, interpersonal effectiveness, communication, continuing learning, group processes, adult learning, and technological facility.

From these three sets of competencies, several commonalities emerge. In addition to demonstrating effectiveness in the classroom, teacher leaders should have strong interpersonal and communication skills, be committed to professional growth in themselves and others, and be able to facilitate collaboration—all with a clear focus on student success.

Putting Competencies in Context

Districts looking to adopt specific competencies may benefit from putting them in the context of a framework that illustrates their place within the overall vision for teacher leadership. For example, the Teacher Leader Competency Framework (Leading Educators, 2015)—elements of which are described briefly above—includes a set of core values, four pillars comprising multiple competencies, and a Vision of Excellent Instruction and Culture, all of which complement each other to achieve the ultimate desired outcomes of teacher effectiveness and student learning. Specifically, the core values indicate a capacity for leadership, which informs each of the four pillars—developing self, coaching others, leading teams, and driving initiatives. The pillars then support each other such that teachers develop their leadership skills and apply those skills through coaching others or leading teams, thereby driving initiatives that align with the overall vision and advance teacher effectiveness and student learning.

Using a framework such as the aforementioned can assist in the development and implementation of teacher leadership systems by helping to align those systems with organizational goals, communicate the purpose of teacher leadership, and establish a coherent and consistent set of criteria to aid in the selection and ongoing support of teacher leaders.

Conditions for Success of Teacher Leadership

For teacher leaders to thrive and be successful impacting teaching practice and student learning, two critical conditions for their success are repeatedly emphasized in practitioner, scholarly, and advocacy literature: leadership and learning.

Leadership

Principal support is key for the success of teacher leadership because they can influence quality and effectiveness (Heineke & Poinick, 2013). Unfortunately, there is evidence to support that principal support of teacher leadership is more readily espoused than enacted (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). In order for teacher leaders to overcome teacher resistance, the principal must create the culture and build enabling conditions that promote and encourage teacher leadership (Owens, 2015). Teachers have to be accepted as leaders among their peers (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2011). Worth noting is that teacher leadership and principal effectiveness can be maximized when teacher leader talents and expertise are harnessed by the principal (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2011).

New Leaders studied the role of the principal in cultivating teacher leadership. They refer to teacher leadership as a “smart investment” and posit that, “principals are uniquely positioned to develop and support clearly-defined teacher leadership roles that advance school improvement priorities and reflect individual teacher strengths, interests, and needs” (New Leaders, 2015, p. 5). Based on their experience preparing principals and from emerging research, they identified five interconnected actions great principals take to cultivate teacher leadership for school

improvement: 1) identify teachers ready to lead; 2) distribute leadership school-wide; 3) provide high-quality leadership training; 4) set teacher leader goals for growth and results; and 5) allocate school resources for teacher leadership (New Leaders, 2015).

Learning

Ongoing professional learning is crucial in order for teacher leaders to be successful (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Taylor (2008) stresses the importance of teacher leaders having instructional guidance, such as professional development, technical support, and peer collaboration. Other researchers cite the importance of the teacher leader to have a working knowledge of adult learning theory (Bell, Thacker, & Schargel, 2011). Suggested areas for teacher leader development include, but are not limited to: how to lead professional development, strategic planning and data analysis, effective instruction, district initiatives, equity and diversity, implementing curricula, and responsive coaching (Hemphill & Duffield, 2007). Explicit attention must be paid to the preparation of teachers for leadership and the preparation of principals to leverage teacher leadership. Structures that promote teachers learning and working together on a daily basis, with a focus on valued teaching practices, are more likely to result in teacher leadership flourishing (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Identify a clear, focused purpose for teacher leadership based on the needs of the students. Systems need to define the processes that are most critical to student learning and then design teacher leadership in service of them, rather than defining teacher leadership roles first and then figuring out how they can support the most important work (Curtis, 2013). Having a clear problem statement linked to a vision for teacher leadership enables strategic actions to be implemented for success.

Design a system that ensures collaboration between district coaches and school-based teacher leaders. Zrike and Connolly (2015) describe the power of a collaborative relationship between district content specialists and school-based teacher leaders in partnership with the principal. Teacher leadership should not be practiced in isolation; support and accountability are required to maintain focus and expand the perspective of all parties involved.

Select teacher leaders strategically and thoughtfully to maximize their impact. The researchers at New Leaders recommend that for teacher leaders to be accepted by peers as a resource, teacher leader selection criteria should include content expertise, excellent instructional skills, and a proven record of getting results for students. They found that, “teachers who have adult leadership experience and know how to use data to inform instruction before entering a leadership training program exhibit stronger leadership skills once on the job” (New Leaders, 2015, p. 6).

Provide ongoing learning and leadership development opportunities for teacher leaders. A recent study (Valdez, Broin, & Carroll, 2015) by New Leaders found that when teacher leaders’ learning and development is intentionally supported, they can “immediately boost student learning in their schools, quickly develop and apply critical leadership skills, and fill critical gaps in the leadership pipeline” (Valdez, et al., 2015, p. 7). Additionally, ongoing and meaningful feedback is needed for teacher leaders to effectively manage new leadership responsibilities.

Create opportunities for teacher learning to focus on reflection on teaching rather than the replication of teaching. Margolis and Doring (2012) studied a hybrid model of teacher leaders who enacted a studio classroom setting where teachers would observe teacher leaders in their own classroom in the presence of students. As a result, the focus of the learning was on the transmission of best practices instead of on empowering teachers with their own curiosity and reflection. Efforts to change teaching practice failed in this model because the importance of teacher inquiry and reflection was neglected.

Explore and test alternative approaches to teacher leadership using action research methods to document impact. In TNTP’s (2015) study entitled, *The Mirage: Confronting the Hard Truth About Our Quest for Teacher Development*, the frequency of teacher development activities (observations, coaching, formal collaboration, and professional development) cannot be linked directly to teacher improvement of practice. “Every teacher development strategy, no matter how intensive, seems to be the equivalent of a coin flip: Some teachers will get better and about the same number won’t” (TNTP, 2015, p. 22). Teacher leaders will need to understand the specific needs of individual teachers relative to the students they teach and be able to provide targeted, personalized support.

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