

Teacher Leaders

▶ Boosting Teacher Effectiveness and Student Achievement

What are Teacher Leaders and Teacher Leadership?

Teacher leaders and teacher leadership are not new concepts. Some of us may remember the “teacher career ladder” initiatives of the 1980s. Without those early efforts, the current press to define teacher leadership and what it looks like in our schools would have far less traction.

Teacher leaders are teachers who aspire to stretch beyond their classrooms to engage in leadership roles that take many shapes and forms, both “informal” and “formal”. These teachers view the school as a whole, see the “big picture” and focus on how they can help improve aspects of the school to result in increases in student achievement. Teacher leaders see themselves as “teachers” first and do not want to become principals or administrators, but want to work collaboratively with their colleagues and school administrators to improve school and student performance.

This issue of *The Progress of Education Reform* will discuss the roles teacher leaders can play; how they can contribute to overall school and student success; how some states are formally supporting teacher leaders and the concept of teacher leadership; and policy implications and recommendations for state policymakers on how to explore and/or expand teacher leadership in their states.

What's Inside

- ▶ What are teacher leaders?
- ▶ Why are they needed for higher student achievement?
- ▶ What are states doing to increase teacher leadership opportunities?



2010
DECEMBER
Vol. 11, No. 6

THE PROGRESS OF
Education Reform



Education Commission
of the States

Teacher leaders are often found in formal and informal roles

- ▶ Mentoring new and current teachers (formal and/or informal)
- ▶ Designing and implementing teacher professional development to increase teacher effectiveness (formal)
- ▶ Serving as department chairs (formal)
- ▶ Serving as union representatives (formal)
- ▶ Serving as site committee members (formal)
- ▶ Serving as staff developers (formal)
- ▶ Serving as curriculum specialists (formal)
- ▶ Leading professional learning communities (informal)
- ▶ Assisting or guiding colleagues in accessing or selecting appropriate research-based strategies (informal)
- ▶ Engaging in reflective dialogue with colleagues to improve instruction and student results (informal)

While several definitions of “teacher leadership” circulate in articles and the extremely limited research that exists, the following encapsulates generally accepted thinking:

“Teacher leadership is the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of the school community to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement.”¹

As a leader in the field, Charlotte Danielson writes in *Teacher Leadership that Strengthens Professional Practice* that teacher leadership is a “set of skills demonstrated by teachers who continue to teach students but also have an influence that extends beyond their own classrooms to others within their own school and elsewhere.”² The notion that teacher leaders want to stay in the classroom and stay connected to students are critical points. Teacher leaders are “teachers” first and “leaders” outside their classrooms second.



Why are Teacher Leaders Needed?

Teacher leaders have always existed in every school, but until recent years, an emphasis on defining and recognizing what a teacher leader is and does has been absent. As goals and challenges of the teaching profession have evolved, many new and existing teachers, along with administrators, have recognized the need for and benefit of cultivating teacher leadership.

- ▶ The teaching profession is relatively “flat,” meaning that in most schools an identifiable career ladder is missing. If a teacher wants to “move up” in the profession, that teacher has had only one clear opportunity of moving into the administrative ranks. Many teachers do not want to become principals or other school administrators, they want to remain in their classrooms and also provide leadership outside their classrooms. If teacher leader options aren’t available to those wishing to “move up,” some leave the teaching profession entirely. Having more career options will aid in recruiting and retaining highly effective teachers.
- ▶ Teachers’ tenure generally is longer than principals’ — so those who provide the most continuity in a school are likely to be the teachers. Establishing a collaborative leadership system between school administrators and teachers has the potential of lasting long past any administrator’s tenure, keeping instructional improvement initiatives and their momentum progressing beyond staffing changes.
- ▶ Principals can no longer do it alone — the role of the principal in today’s schools is increasingly complex and time-consuming. They have many diverse responsibilities (e.g., discipline, facility maintenance, community relations, instructional leader, teacher evaluator, teacher mentor, reform leader, etc.) and need the help of their teacher leaders to implement change and reform to improve school and student performance.

“Having more career options will aid in recruiting and retaining highly effective teachers.”

Dr. Mark A. Smylie, an expert in the field of teacher leadership from the University of Illinois at Chicago, views teacher leadership as an instrument for:

- ▶ School and classroom improvement
- ▶ Teacher learning, professional development, motivation, recruitment, and retention
- ▶ Improving the effectiveness of administrative leadership
- ▶ Developing teaching as a profession with a career path
- ▶ The democratization of schools.³

What is the Latest Work on Teacher Leaders/Leadership?

In May 2008, the Educational Testing Service (ETS) convened a group of education stakeholders to examine current research and thinking about the critical leadership roles that teachers play in contributing to successful school reform. This initial group subsequently expanded its membership and mission to form the *Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium*, representing a broad array of education organizations, state education agencies, teacher leaders, principal leaders, institutions of higher education and teacher unions. This consortium developed draft *Model Teacher Leader Standards* that were released for public comment in early 2010. (Consortium Web site: <http://tlstandards.weebly.com/>)

The purpose of these draft “model standards” is to encourage professional discussion of what constitutes the full range of competencies that teacher leaders possess and how this form of leadership can be distinguished from, but work in tandem with, formal administrative leadership roles to support good teaching and promote student learning.”⁴

The draft *Model Teacher Leader Standards* (http://tstandards.pbworks.com/f/13852_TeacherLeaderStnds_HR.pdf) follow a similar format as the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISSLC) *State Standards for School Leaders* and contain seven domains:

- ▶ **Domain I** – Understanding Adults As Learners to Support Professional Learning Communities
- ▶ **Domain II** – Accessing and Using Research to Improve Practice and Student Achievement
- ▶ **Domain III** – Promoting Professional Learning for Continuous Improvement
- ▶ **Domain IV** – Facilitating Improvements in Instruction and Student Learning
- ▶ **Domain V** – Using Assessments and Data for School and District Improvement
- ▶ **Domain VI** – Improving Outreach and Collaboration with Families and Community
- ▶ **Domain VII** – Advocating for Student Learning and the Profession

One of the next steps in the evolution of the *Model Teacher Leader Standards* is to cross-reference them with the newly updated Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) *Model Core Teaching Standards* ([http://www.ccsso.org/Resources/Programs/Interstate_Teacher_Assessment_Consortium_\(InTASC\).html](http://www.ccsso.org/Resources/Programs/Interstate_Teacher_Assessment_Consortium_(InTASC).html)), to ensure alignment. The INTASC standards were released for public comment in July 2010.

How states are moving teacher leadership forward

Kansas

The Kansas State Department of Education has established teacher leader standards that lead to licensure.

<https://ks.nea.org/profession/license/licensetchrleader.html>

New Jersey

Montclair State University has created a Master of Education in Teacher Leadership program.

<http://cehs.montclair.edu/academic/curriculumteach/programs/masterteachleadership.shtml>

Virginia

Virginia Commonwealth University has created the Center for Teacher Leadership to provide coursework and training for teachers wishing to move into leadership positions.

<http://www.ctl.vcu.edu/index.html>

Alabama, Delaware, Kansas, Kentucky and Ohio

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is working with Alabama, Delaware, Kansas, Kentucky and Ohio on creating teacher leader preparation curricula.

<http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=3458>

Other Resources

Education/Evolving

This Web site is working to encourage a radically different model of school organization, in which the authority for arranging both the learning program and the administration of a school is placed with a formally-organized group of teachers ... and in which the teachers accept collegially the responsibility for the school's success.

<http://www.educationevolving.org/teacherpartnerships>

Opportunity at the Top

This article, by Bryan C. Hassel and Emily Ayscue Hassel, discusses how America's best teachers can close the gaps, raise the bar and keep our nation great.

http://opportunityculture.org/images/stories/opportunity_report_web.pdf

Model Teacher Leader Standards, 2010

This site, by the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, provides the latest draft of the Model Teacher Leader Standards.

<http://tstandards.weebly.com/>

Teacher Leadership as a Key to Education Innovation: Action Steps and Promising Strategies for State, District, and University Officials

This article by NCCTQ provides current information about teacher leadership, state trends, pathways to teacher leadership and recommended state and district action.

http://www.tqsource.org/pdfs/TQ_Policy-to-PracticeBriefTeacherLeadership.pdf

Teacher Leadership That Strengthens Professional Practice, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

(C. Danielson, 2006)

This book is designed as a resource not only for prospective teacher leaders, but also for administrators who want to better support the development of outstanding teacher leaders.

Taking the Lead — New Roles for Teachers and School-based Coaches

(J., Killian and C. Harrison, National Staff Development Council, 2006)

This book identifies the many roles school-based coaches play in providing just-in-time professional learning that addresses real problems individual teachers encounter in their classrooms.

Implications for State Policymakers

Most educators agree that teacher leaders and teacher leadership exist in all schools – and they are helping to improve teaching and learning in a variety of formal and informal ways. Many state and higher education institutions have taken up the charge by developing pathways for teachers to become teacher leaders through specialized degrees, credentials and endorsements.

For some, however, the teacher leadership debate is about whether or not teacher leadership should be formally recognized and compensated. For others, the debate centers on whether or not all teachers are capable of being or should be teacher leaders.

State policymakers would be well-advised to gain a full understanding of teacher leadership and how it can be applied to improve overall teacher effectiveness and student achievement by:

- ▶ Utilizing the Model Teacher Leader Standards and the INTASC Model Core Teaching Standards in any future initiatives related to strengthening teacher certification, teacher preparation, teacher evaluation, teacher recruitment and retention, teacher effectiveness and increasing student achievement.
- ▶ Identifying how teacher leaders are currently being used in states' schools through informal and formal means — and whether or not there are specific paths teachers can take to become recognized as teacher leaders. [student-backpack.jpg](#)
- ▶ Establishing task forces and professional learning communities to discuss and define the roles that teacher leaders can play to increase teacher effectiveness and student achievement school-wide, district-wide, and statewide.
- ▶ Embracing teacher leadership as a strategy to “do things differently” in education — helping school administrators to lead and achieve whole-school reform and turnaround, retaining high-quality teachers in the profession longer, raising the level of professionalism in the teaching profession, and increasing student achievement for all students.

Endnotes

- ¹ J. Barr, J. Sommerness and J. Hur, *Teacher Leadership*. In T. Good (Ed.), *21st Century Education: A Reference Handbook* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008), 287.
- ² Charlotte Danielson, *Teacher Leadership That Strengthens Professional Practice* (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2006), 12.
- ³ Mark A. Smylie, *Thoughts on the Development of Teacher Leadership*, PowerPoint presentation, National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality Meeting, October 28-29, 2009, Washington D.C., http://www.tqsource.org/whatworks/wwc09highlyeffective/presentations/TeacherLeadership2009_Smylie.pdf.
- ⁴ Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium Letter, 2010, <http://tlstandards.weebly.com>.

Past issues of *The Progress of Education Reform* are available on our Web site at: www.ecs.org/per.

This issue of *The Progress of Education Reform* was made possible by a grant from the GE Foundation. If you have any questions about this issue, please contact: Barbara Thompson, Director for Teacher Quality and Leadership, Education Commission of the States, at 303.299.3657 or bthompson@ecs.org.



GE Foundation

© 2010 by the Education Commission of the States (ECS). All rights reserved.

ECS encourages its readers to share our information with others. To reprint or excerpt some of our material, please contact the ECS Communications Department at 303.299.3600 or e-mail ecs@ecs.org.

The Education Commission of the States is a nationwide nonprofit organization formed in 1965 to help governors, state legislators, state education officials and others develop policies to improve the quality of education. ECS is the only nationwide, nonpartisan interstate compact devoted to education at all levels.

Past issues are available in print from the Education Commission of the States for \$7 plus postage and handling. Please order from the ECS Distribution Center, 700 Broadway, Suite 810, Denver, CO 80203-3442; 303.299.3692; fax: 303.296.8332; or ecs@ecs.org. ECS accepts prepaid orders, Visa, MasterCard and American Express. All sales are final. Pricing subject to change.

Postage and handling charges apply if your order totals:
Up to \$10.00 — \$3.50
\$10.01-25.00 — \$5.00
\$25.01-50.00 — \$6.50
\$50.01-75.00 — \$9.25
\$75.01-100.00 — \$10.75
Over \$100.01 — \$12.00

Discounts are available for bulk orders of past issues:
10-49 — 10% discount
50-99 — 20% discount
100+ — 30% discount.

**Equipping
Education Leaders,
Advancing Ideas**