

# ASK THE TEAM

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## Leadership and Lattices: New Pathways Across the Teaching Profession

### Question From the Field

**How are states creating teacher-leader models that keep accomplished teachers in the classroom while building a sustainable leadership pipeline?**

Teachers need career pathways that provide new challenges and sustained opportunities for leadership without leaving the classroom. Better opportunities for leadership and innovative pathways help increase the retention of strong teachers. Although few such programs existed several years ago, a growing number of states, districts, charter schools, and other organizations have recently introduced some kind of teacher-leader program (Natale, Gaddis, Bassett, & McKnight, 2013). To support these efforts, in 2014 the U.S. Department of Education and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards jointly launched the **Teach to Lead** initiative. Designed to help expand opportunities for teacher leadership while also allowing teachers to stay in the classroom, the initiative hosts an online community, **Commit to Lead**, as well as regional Teacher Leadership Summits.

In this Ask-the-Team brief, we summarize the cross-sector research related to leadership programs, outline three best practices from existing teacher-leader programs, and provide next steps for state leaders interested in implementing a teacher-leader system. Throughout, we highlight different programs and strategies that have had some success in the field.

To identify successful teacher-leader programs, we first examined cross-sector research (e.g., business and medicine) that identified strategies for leadership

*“Our failure in education to create a modern career progression for teachers where they have opportunities to apply their talents in different and more challenging ways while continuing to work directly with students is out of step with where we are as a society. Few people entering the workforce expect to do the same job for 10 years, let alone 40.”*

—Amanda Kocon, Vice President, TNTP

### Tip

#### What Is a “Teacher-Leader” Model?

In this brief, we define a teacher-leader model as any program or policy that includes a career pathway (or “career ladder”) for teachers, whereby excellent teachers are recognized for their performance and leadership skills.

programs that aim to increase the retention of high-performing employees. We then scanned dozens of teacher-leader programs<sup>1</sup> and identified programs with some evidence of a positive impact. Because so many of these models are new, however, little research or documentation exists to demonstrate their effectiveness. Our search identified only five programs with some evidence of success, such as increasing student achievement or teacher retention. Although these programs are not exemplars, they offer valuable lessons learned for developing teacher-leader systems.

## Lessons From Cross-Sector Research

- **Lesson 1. Opportunities for achievement, recognition, advancement, and growth matter to high performers in education and other professions.** Although salary increases typically accompany progress within an organization, opportunities for other types of advancement can boost retention among high-performing employees (Ableidinger & Kowal, 2010). Unlike pay increases, the ability to create or expand opportunities for career progress is not necessarily bound by budgetary constraints. Research also shows that high-performing employees are more attracted to promotion opportunities compared with low-performing employees, and they also are more likely to leave a position because of a lack of opportunity for advancement (Steel, Griffeth, Hom, & Lyons, 2002).
- **Differentiated pay structures make it more likely that high performers will stay in the profession.** When a company ties even a portion of its employee compensation to performance, the best workers increasingly remain, whereas low performers continue to depart (Ableidinger & Kowal, 2010). Sometimes, these staffing changes improve the overall value of a company's workforce by increasing the number of high performers and decreasing the number of low performers. As a result, about 90 percent of major companies in the United States use performance pay to both retain employees and increase their motivation and productivity ("Driven to Distraction," 2010). It is not enough to offer high performers more, though. Performance pay systems also must be designed well, meaning that compensation is competitive and raises are timely (Ableidinger & Kowal, 2010).

### Food for Thought

Researchers found that excellent teachers were more likely than low-performing teachers to cite dissatisfaction with career advancement opportunities as a reason for leaving the profession (TNTP, 2012). In addition, a 2012 survey indicated that teachers view higher pay as a key way of elevating the profession and boosting the quality of and the respect for teaching (Teach Plus, 2012).

<sup>1</sup> Our scan included winners of Teacher Incentive Fund grants and Teacher Advancement Program sites, as well as school systems and other organizations with a reputation for being leaders in this field.

## Program Spotlight

**Leading Educators** is a nonprofit organization that offers a two-year fellowship to help teachers currently serving in leadership roles develop their leadership skills. Fellows participate in a series of training sessions, visit excellent schools, work with a peer cohort, and work with a coach throughout the school year. In addition, all fellows must design and implement a two-year project aimed at raising the achievement of a target student group and developing the capacity of the adults they oversee.

- Fellows do not receive additional pay as Leading Educators fellows; however, as of 2013 more than one half of all fellows had been promoted to new leadership roles since participating in Leading Educators.
- Ninety-eight percent of past and current fellows continue to serve high-need populations.
- In Kansas City, fellows' students showed five times the academic growth of their counterparts across the district.
- In New Orleans, fellows' students grew 12 times more than their counterparts did across the district.

In collaboration with the Aspen Institute, Leading Educators recently published a [series of briefs](#) sharing lessons learned on teacher leadership programs in Denver, Colorado; Tennessee; and Pritzker College Prep in Chicago, Illinois.

Sources: *Leading Educators Factsheet* ([http://www.leadingeducators.org/resource/1362157767000/aboutus\\_impact\\_docs/LE\\_Factsheet\\_Nat\\_2012-1221.pdf](http://www.leadingeducators.org/resource/1362157767000/aboutus_impact_docs/LE_Factsheet_Nat_2012-1221.pdf)) and *Leading Educators: What We Do* (<http://www.leadingeducators.org/whatwedo>)

## District Spotlight

**Teach Plus** runs several programs aimed at demonstrably effective urban teachers who want to stay in the classroom while expanding their impact as leaders. Its programs are designed to give urban teachers the skills and pathways to effect both school- and system-level change.

The **Teaching Policy Fellowship** is a highly selective, 18-month program for teachers who want to have a voice in the policy decisions that impact their classrooms. The **Teach Plus Network** is an expanding series of in-person and virtual forums that provides more than 12,000 teachers nationwide with opportunities to advocate for policies that elevate the teaching profession and retain effective teachers.

In addition, the **T3 Initiative** is a first-of-its-kind program designed to ensure that students have increased access to excellent, experienced teachers by placing cohorts of highly effective teachers as teacher leaders in the schools that need them most. The T3 Initiative recruits, develops, and supports experienced and highly effective teachers to become turnaround specialists who then serve as leaders in high-need schools.

- Data from the first two cohorts show that many T3 teachers have eliminated achievement gaps with other schools in the Boston Public Schools system and are now exceeding the district average.
- T3 schools' student achievement results also surpassed other turnaround schools in Massachusetts. Schools of both T3 cohorts have outpaced turnaround school gains in Massachusetts by 10 or more percentage points.

Sources: *T3: Closing the Gap: Progress Over Two Years in T3 Schools* (<http://www.teachplus.org/our-impact/practice/student-outcomes>) and *Ready for the Next Challenge: Improving the Retention and Distribution of Excellent Teachers in Urban Schools: A Proposal by Teachers* ([http://www.teachplus.org/sites/default/files/publication/pdf/ready\\_for\\_the\\_next\\_challenge\\_improving\\_the\\_retention\\_and\\_distribution\\_of\\_excellent\\_teachers\\_in\\_urban\\_schools.pdf](http://www.teachplus.org/sites/default/files/publication/pdf/ready_for_the_next_challenge_improving_the_retention_and_distribution_of_excellent_teachers_in_urban_schools.pdf))

# STRATEGIES FROM CURRENT TEACHER-LEADER SYSTEMS

## 1. CREATE A CAREER LATTICE

### Ensure Multiple Routes to Advancement

Many teacher-leader models offer only one kind of advanced role—helping other teachers. Excellent teachers are diverse and may or may not have an interest in or the skill set to succeed as instructional coaches or mentors. An ideal career structure is a lattice in which great teachers can pursue different paths that best fit their strengths and career interests. The career lattice could include leading peers or provide roles such as reaching more students using technology, serving as a multiclassroom teacher, and specializing in a particular subject or grade combination.

#### District Spotlight

In *Denver Public Schools*, the district implemented a Differentiated Roles Pilot to address the challenge of principals' overburdened plates, especially for classroom observation and feedback. As part of the pilot, teacher leaders serve as team leads for six to 10 colleagues. Team leads teach for one half to three quarters of the day and devote the rest of their time exclusively to management responsibilities, including the following tasks:

- "Observe six to ten colleagues as regularly as once per week and provide feedback in one-one-one meetings
- Lead regular team meetings to discuss problems of practice and common areas for development
- Conduct formal evaluations" (p. 2)

Team leads are provided training on topics such as approaches to coaching, debriefing, and difficult conversations, and they receive a \$5,000 annual stipend. The program costs approximately \$100,000 per school to operate. The district plans to expand the pilot in the 2014–15 school year.

Source: *Sharing the Load: Denver Public Schools' Differentiated Roles Pilot* ([http://www.leadingeducators.org/resource/1413573107000/pubs\\_2014\\_oct/AES\\_LE\\_Sharing-the-Load-Denver\\_101614.pdf](http://www.leadingeducators.org/resource/1413573107000/pubs_2014_oct/AES_LE_Sharing-the-Load-Denver_101614.pdf))

## 2. RESTRUCTURE YOUR BUDGET

### Create a Sustainable Model Using Existing Funds

As cross-sector research illustrates, creating meaningful teacher-leader systems that provide opportunities for teachers to extend their impact and incentives to remain in the profession require that excellent teachers earn more. Although the research base on the effects of compensation reform in education is nascent and inconclusive (Allen, 2005; Hough, 2012), several studies have shown that salary increases or bonuses can increase teacher retention and attract new, high-quality talent to the field (Clotfelter, Glennie, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007; Teach Plus, 2012). Funding pay increases in a sustainable fashion, however, has been a major challenge in new career

#### Tip

The Center on Great Teachers and Leaders offers an online tool called the *Innovation Station*. This tool is a one-stop resource for the latest information and tools on recruiting and selecting, retaining, rewarding, and extending the reach of excellent teachers, including teacher-led professional learning. Check out the site to find the latest cutting-edge tools and resources, share strategies, and receive input and feedback from experts.

pathways. In most systems, teacher-leader roles are funded on top of existing school budgets. As grants run out or the leader championing the program leaves the district, the program is likely to end if it does not have a sustainable funding mechanism.

## State Spotlight

The Missouri General Assembly launched **Missouri's Teacher Career Ladder Program** in 1985, which serves as an instructive case for the importance of financial sustainability. The program ended in 2010–11 as a result of budget cutbacks (Livengood, 2010), but it operated successfully for 25 years. The goals of this program were twofold: (1) improve student achievement and (2) attract and retain effective teachers. It was a voluntary program for districts that offered teachers additional pay for performing additional teaching responsibilities. What were the characteristics of the program?

- The program provided teachers who had at least five years of teaching experience supplemental pay in three stages. To earn additional pay, teachers had to assume additional responsibilities, such as private tutoring, participating in professional development, providing students with opportunities for enhanced learning experiences, and leading extended-day activities:
  - **Stage 1.** Up to \$1,500 per year in additional pay for at least two additional teaching responsibilities requiring 60-plus hours per year.
  - **Stage 2.** Up to \$3,000 per year in additional pay for at least three additional teaching responsibilities requiring 90-plus hours per year.
  - **Stage 3.** Up to \$5,000 per year in additional pay for at least four additional teaching responsibilities requiring 120-plus hours per year.

In one study, teachers in districts participating in the Teacher Career Ladder Program were less likely to leave their schools and less likely to leave teaching compared with teachers from nonparticipating districts (Booker & Glazerman, 2009).

Source: *Missouri's Teacher Career Ladder Program* ([https://my.vanderbilt.edu/performanceincentives/files/2012/10/Booker\\_et\\_al\\_for\\_posting1.pdf](https://my.vanderbilt.edu/performanceincentives/files/2012/10/Booker_et_al_for_posting1.pdf))

## District Spotlight

Financial sustainability is one of the five principles guiding reform efforts of **Project L.I.F.T.** in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina. In 2012, Project L.I.F.T. became the first implementation site in Public Impact's initiative to extend the reach of excellent teachers and build an Opportunity Culture for teachers and students (Public Impact, 2013). Four schools worked with Public Impact to develop new staffing plans that include career pathways and sustainable higher pay for teachers filling those roles.

Teachers in new reach-extending roles earn pay supplements of up to \$23,000, which is approximately 50 percent higher than the average teacher pay in North Carolina. The supplement depends on the number of students a teacher reaches, and, in the case of teacher leaders, the number of teachers they oversee. All pay increases, however, are supported through regular per-pupil funding resulting from position exchanges and other funding reallocations, not temporary grants.

In January 2015, the district announced plans to scale up the initiative—adding 17 schools implementing the new models in 2015, with plans to add more in the future.

Sources: *Charlotte, N.C.'s Project L.I.F.T.: New Teaching Roles Create a Culture of Excellence in High-Need Schools* ([http://opportunityculture.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Charlotte\\_N.C.\\_Project\\_L.I.F.T.\\_An\\_Opportunity\\_Culture\\_Case\\_Study-Public\\_Impact.pdf](http://opportunityculture.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Charlotte_N.C._Project_L.I.F.T._An_Opportunity_Culture_Case_Study-Public_Impact.pdf)); *Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and Project L.I.F.T.* (<http://opportunityculture.org/our-initiative/participating-sites/cms-project-lift/>); and *Recruiting in an Opportunity Culture: Lessons Learned* ([http://opportunityculture.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Recruiting\\_in\\_an\\_Opportunity\\_Culture-Public\\_Impact.pdf](http://opportunityculture.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Recruiting_in_an_Opportunity_Culture-Public_Impact.pdf))

### 3. MOVE UP WITHOUT MOVING OUT

#### Keep Great Teachers in the Classroom

New career opportunities often pull great teachers out of the line of responsibility for students. As a result, “moving up” means that many of the best teachers often have limited influence over their peers and even less opportunity to impact student learning. In addition, teachers who are pulled out of the classroom must be replaced, and there is no guarantee that their positions will be filled by equally effective educators.

#### Food for Thought

Teachers have indicated that leadership opportunities that keep them connected to their own classrooms can be a motivating force in remaining in the profession. The current lack of diverse career opportunities is a significant source of dissatisfaction within the profession (Hart, 1987, 1994, 1995; Rinehart, Short, Short, & Eckley, 1998).

#### State Spotlight

Recommendations from the Iowa Department of Education’s *Task Force on Teacher Leadership and Compensation* aim to provide new career pathways for teachers and increase compensation while making sure that excellent teachers can continue to teach. The initiative was formally adopted in the state’s education reform package passed by the Legislature in 2013.

In teachers’ first two years, they will be called “initial” teachers. When they enter their third year, they are promoted to “career” teachers and become eligible to apply for one of three leadership positions:

- **Model teachers.** These teachers become part of a database of teachers willing to invite others to observe their classrooms.
- **Mentor teachers.** These teachers teach 70 percent of the time and mentor other teachers 30 percent of the time.
- **Lead teachers.** These teachers teach 50 percent of the time and mentor other teachers 50 percent of the time.

Thirty-nine districts were chosen to implement the first teacher leadership systems in fall 2014. An additional 126 districts were chosen to put in place local plans—76 of them during the 2015–16 school year and another 50 during the 2016–17 school year. The districts serve a mix of urban, suburban, and rural communities. Iowa’s goal is to have all districts participate in the optional system by 2016–17.

*Source: 126 School Districts Chosen for Teacher Leadership System (<https://www.educateiowa.gov/article/2014/12/22/126-school-districts-chosen-teacher-leadership-system>)*



## WHAT'S MY ROLE? OPTIONS FOR STATE LEADERS

Our scan of teacher-leader programs showed that the majority of them have been developed at the district level, not the state level. State departments of education can still play an important role in motivating and shaping programs at the district level by setting guidelines for robust teacher-leader systems. The guidelines should include career paths that have the following characteristics:

- Diversity.** The career paths are diverse, offering excellent teachers multiple routes toward advancement and to build on their skills.
- Expandable.** Expand the number of students for which teachers are responsible versus removing excellent teachers from the classroom by default.
- Pay commensurate with responsibility.** Pay teachers more in exchange for taking on additional responsibilities.
- Sustainable.** The career paths are financially sustainable on existing per-pupil funds.

A state department of education could create a model teacher-leader system that districts can adopt, or propose different programs that meet the same standards. Alternatively, a state could help a few districts pilot new systems or sponsor a grant program for district proposals of teacher-leader systems that meet the guidelines. The state also could convene conferences or webinars to help districts share ideas and resources for creating a teacher-leader system.



The **Arizona Career Ladder Program** provides a clear path to career advancement for teachers who wish to remain in the classroom, and it is one of the oldest continuous teacher incentive programs in the country. Although responsibility for funding the program has shifted from the state to individual districts in the years since the program's 1985 launch, 28 districts still participate, and approximately 40 percent of the state's teaching workforce participates in the program. The characteristics of the program are as follows:

- **Pay with a purpose.** Participating districts must use a performance-based compensation system, which they create.
- **Opportunities for advancement.** Participating districts design their own career ladders, which must do the following:
  - Establish a multilevel system of teaching positions.
  - Provide opportunities for continued professional development.
  - Require improved or advanced teaching skills, higher level instructional responsibilities, and demonstration of pupil academic achievement.
- **Impact.** Participating districts have seen significant improvements in student achievement in reading, mathematics, and writing.

Sources: *The Effects of the Career Ladder Program on Student Achievement* (<http://www.azed.gov/wp-content/uploads/PDF/CareerLadderReport.pdf>) and *Arizona Career Ladder Program: Participating Districts* ([http://www.azed.gov/wp-content/uploads/PDF/Participating\\_Districts.pdf](http://www.azed.gov/wp-content/uploads/PDF/Participating_Districts.pdf))



## I WANT TO KNOW MORE!

### Resources

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**For more examples or information on this topic**, please e-mail [gtlcenter@air.org](mailto:gtlcenter@air.org).

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