



## **Teacher Leadership** as a Key to **Education Innovation**

As states and districts work to recruit young, enthusiastic, highly competent, and enterprising professionals to the field of education, they are left with a quandary: What would draw talent of this caliber to teach in classrooms and how can talented teachers be retained in schools?

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Action Steps and Promising Strategies for State,  
District, and University Officials

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## The Call for Teacher Leadership

Teachers are feeling restless. With nowhere to go but the principalship, teaching has come to be seen as a flat profession. As states and districts work to recruit young, enthusiastic, highly competent, and enterprising professionals to the field, they are left with a quandary: What would draw talent of this caliber to teach in classrooms and how can talented teachers be retained in schools? This realization, coupled with some recent action taken by the U.S. Department of Education, has set education policymakers on the road to transformation.

Both as an innovation in staffing and a strategy for teacher recruitment, development, and retention, designing leadership roles for teachers is on the horizon as a promising practice at the federal and state levels. From the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 to *A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (U.S. Department of Education, 2010a), the effectiveness of teachers and school leaders is a primary topic of conversation within the education system. In the literature on the Race to the Top fund, education leaders are called upon to strategize ways for “recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010b).

Similarly, President Obama’s 2011 budget for education proposes to set aside funding for the Excellent Instructional Teams authority, which would include the following three components:

- Effective Teachers and Leaders State Grants
- The Teacher and Leader Innovation Fund
- The Teacher and Leader Pathways Program

These initiatives relay the same message: teacher quality is a critical key to the success of our schools. Moreover, the initiatives make clear that teacher quality reforms cannot be divorced from the equally critical issue of school leadership.

Teacher leadership can improve teacher retention, strengthen the teaching profession, build the capacity of school leaders, and facilitate innovative advances to the structure of school staffing. Therefore, many states are beginning to formalize teacher-leadership options, and this expanded career continuum is expected to facilitate improved teacher recruitment and retention rates (Koppich, 2001). This TQ Center Policy-to-Practice Brief will discuss these innovations and provide action steps and promising strategies for other educational leaders to further promote teacher leadership in schools.

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## Defining Teacher Leadership

Teacher leadership is the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, formally influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of the school community to improve teaching and learning practices with the goal of increased student learning and achievement. Teacher leaders contribute to important decisions and actively initiate advances in school policy and practice. They may lead projects or reforms or serve to advance the instructional practices of their peers. By clearly and regularly communicating with and engaging fellow teachers in dialogue about improving teaching and learning, teacher leaders build a school culture of trust, which leads to improvement in instructional practice and ultimately positively affects student achievement (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

The role of teachers in leadership positions has yet to gain a concrete and authentic stronghold as part of the larger school-reform initiative. And although teachers often self-report performing leadership-like duties within their schools, the term *leader* is still reserved for administrative personnel only (Cherubini, 2008). As teachers begin to serve in formal roles as hybrid practitioner-leaders, it is important to note that teachers

have been serving in informal leadership roles for ages. Researchers have pointed to the ways in which teachers have always worked to lead, even when not formally called upon to do so. According to Danielson (2006) and Killion and Harrison (2006), informal teacher-leaders are those individuals who:

- Take initiative among faculty members.
- Mobilize people for a common purpose.
- Monitor the progress of other teachers.
- Act as a liaison between faculty and administration.
- Share their knowledge and skill of the practice with others.

There are certain traits that set these informal leaders apart from teacher leaders in the formal sense. For example, they frequently report a desire to stay “behind the scenes” and tend to shirk offers of authoritative roles (Danielson, 2006). In either a formal or informal capacity, the small body of research on the topic of teacher-leadership contends that many teachers are willing and able to exhibit leadership characteristics in their schools and among their fellow faculty members.

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## Teacher Leadership: State Trends and the National Context

With encouragement from the research, policymaker, and practitioner communities, many states and school districts have begun to implement strategies that will help build opportunities for teacher leaders. Whereas districts and schools can formalize teacher leadership through differentiated staffing models, certification and licensure is a key mechanism for formalizing teacher leadership at the state level. For some, this work comes in the form of revised certification and licensure, whereas others have taken a cue from institutions of higher education (IHEs) and aligned their own performance standards with a new leadership-focused curriculum. Many of these initiatives are too new for any rigorous evaluations to have taken place, but it is of interest to note the objectives and design of each:

- **Arkansas**

Education officials at the state-level in Arkansas have developed the Instructional Facilitator Endorsement, a certificate for highly qualified teachers who show a desire and affinity for providing instructional support for fellow teachers. These Instructional Facilitators are expected to apply

knowledge of adult learning to their practice of fellow teacher-support (for more information, see [http://arkedu.state.ar.us/commemos/static/fy0809/attachments/IF\\_job\\_description\\_June\\_09.doc](http://arkedu.state.ar.us/commemos/static/fy0809/attachments/IF_job_description_June_09.doc)).

- **The KODAK Group**

Convened by the Council of Chief State School Officers, and led by Dr. Joe Murphy, the KODAK Group is a five-state leadership consortium. The collaborative effort of Kansas, Ohio, Delaware, Alabama, and Kentucky is focused on developing teacher-leader preparation curricula (for more information, see <http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=3458>).

- **Kansas**

State officials and leaders in Kansas have created the Teaching in Kansas Commission, an advisory board that recommended such policy changes as a teacher-leader certification and the development of teacher leader standards. To date, the certification has been established, and the standards have been finalized (for more information, see <http://www.kasa-ks.org/council/KELC%20update.pdf>).

- **Illinois**

Having identified the particular characteristics and job preferences of those teachers serving in informal leadership roles in their schools, school leaders in Illinois have created the Teacher Leader Endorsement. This certificate is provided for those teachers who wish to serve as a leader within their schools while remaining in the classroom (for more information, see <http://www.ibhe.state.il.us/SchoolLeadership/Meeting1031/EndorsementSummary.pdf>).

- **Louisiana**

The Educational Leadership Certification of Louisiana provides teachers with varying levels of certification. Teachers may choose to pursue, in the form of professional development and university coursework, any certificate from Teacher Leader to Educational Leader Level 3 (for more information, see [http://www.selu.edu/acad\\_research/depts/edlt/acad\\_advising/assets/ed\\_leadership\\_certif.pdf](http://www.selu.edu/acad_research/depts/edlt/acad_advising/assets/ed_leadership_certif.pdf)).

From the national perspective, more than half the states (approximately 60 percent), and the District of Columbia, that submitted an application for the first round of Race to the Top funding included strategies to address teacher leadership in their applications. As shown in Table 1, most of the states interested in teacher-leadership roles (approximately 50 percent) focused on compensation (i.e., providing additional compensation for teachers who take on additional roles and responsibilities in their school). Other states (20 percent) focused on using newly developed teacher evaluation systems to identify effective teachers. These effective teachers would serve as leaders in their schools through providing professional development, serving as instructional coaches/mentors, or working to coordinate school-based student support services. Two other states focused, respectively, on revising their teacher leadership standards and creating a tiered licensure structure that includes serving as a teacher leader as a requirement to move from one tier to the next.

**Table 1. Strategies to Address Teacher Leadership Included in State Race to the Top Fund Applications**

Strategy	State
Using evaluation results to identify effective teachers to serve as professional development creators/presenters, intervention specialists, instructional coaches, mentors, coordinators of comprehensive school-based student support, peer assistance review leaders, and so on.	9 states
Revising teacher leadership standards.	1 state
Creating a tiered licensure structure that includes teacher leadership requirements.	1 state
Providing additional pay for taking on new roles and responsibilities.	20 states

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## Pathways to Teacher Leadership

Expanding the structure of teachers' careers can have a positive impact on stakeholders such as teachers and students, but other key stakeholders need to be included as well, namely unions and IHEs.

Although union leaders may be supportive of the idea of expanded career options for teachers, they may be skeptical of placing new teacher-leaders in evaluative or supervisory roles (Goldstein, 2010). Furthermore, education associations are often averse to removing highly effective teachers from the classroom, as it takes instructional benefit away from students, so the question of release time may deserve thought and conversation. Finally, any plans to change salary structures, resulting in differentiated compensation for teacher leaders, will have to be vetted.

These conversations seem daunting, but they are not impossible. In fact, some districts across the country have already reached joint district-union agreements over modifying teacher contracts to allow for such changes. In St. Francis, Minnesota, for example, the school district and union collectively created a new teacher career ladder that incorporated a variety of formal teacher leadership positions linked with higher pay and opportunities to help colleagues improve their practice. Initially,

several teachers were approved to receive training by the American Federation of Teachers in the Educational Research & Dissemination professional development program and started up such a teacher-led professional development program in St. Francis, called Teacher Academy. Over time, additional teacher leadership positions were created (e.g., mentors, coaches) for teachers with at least four years of teaching experience and strong reviews from their performance review team (which includes teacher leaders and a school administrator). Likewise, in California's San Juan Unified School District, district officials have collaborated with union leaders to amend their teacher contract to include differentiated compensation, with additional pay written into the contract for those practitioners serving on school leadership teams (San Juan Teachers Association, 2007).

Partnering with universities and other IHEs also is important for developing pathways to teacher leadership. For example, states can work closely with IHEs to design a teacher leadership curriculum as part of a preparation program, develop a part-time professional development offering on the topic, or develop teacher-leadership endorsements or certifications.

The following examples demonstrate how IHEs have initiated this process:

- **Virginia Commonwealth University: Center for Teacher Leadership**

The Center for Teacher Leadership at Virginia Commonwealth University includes both coursework for those teachers aspiring to leadership positions in their own schools and role-specific training for teachers who have already been recruited for this kind of work. It also partners with the New Teacher Center to run an instructional mentoring program in the neighboring school districts (for more information, see <http://www.ctl.vcu.edu/index.html>).

- **University of West Georgia: Teacher Leadership Endorsement Program**

The Teacher Leadership Endorsement Program at University of West Virginia is designed to help teachers build

knowledge and a research base and promote positive school cultures. Practicing teachers can return to their schools with a bolstered foundation on adult learning theory and strategies for promoting a collaborative culture (for more information, see <http://www.westga.edu/~cogs/printable/December%202007/Teacher%20leader.pdf>).

- **Montclair State University: Master of Education in Teacher Leadership**

The Master of Education in Teacher Leadership program at Montclair State University provides practicing teachers with the skill and knowledge needed to effect change among their own faculty. This advanced degree helps to formalize the role of teacher leaders in a school community (for more information, see <http://cehs.montclair.edu/academic/curriculumteach/programs/masterteachleadership.shtml>).

- **University of Phoenix: Master of Arts in Education, Teacher Leadership**

The Master of Arts in Education Teacher Leadership Program at the University of Phoenix is designed to empower teacher leaders to directly influence school culture as champions of innovation and facilitators of school improvement, professional development, and student achievement (for more information, see <http://www.phoenix.edu/programs/degree-programs/education/masters/maed-tl/v001.html>).

## TEACHER LEADERSHIP EXPLORATORY CONSORTIUM

A nationwide group of stakeholders, including members of several state education agencies, has been

working for the past year to develop and roll out model teacher-leader standards. The standards cover a range of performance and knowledge objectives for those being trained as teacher leaders and are meant for use as an instructional guide for universities that plan to roll out teacher-leader preparation programs. Visit <http://tlstandards.weebly.com/> to access the standards, along with corresponding policy statements.



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# Teacher Leadership as a Key to Improving Educator Quality

Despite the current focus of school leadership on administration and operations management, teacher leaders are needed to provide instructional leadership and to be a bridge between faculty members and principals (Usdan, McCloud, & Podmostko, 2001). State-level policies tend to focus on teacher leader certification, standards, and curricula. At the district level, reforms more typically emphasize career ladders and compensation as strategies that create room for teacher leadership to emerge. Combined, these state and district reforms are likely to result in the recruitment and retention of the most effective teachers, which will lead to improved student learning.

Because of the increasing awareness of the promise teacher leadership holds, recent research has begun to address this issue, pointing to a need to enhance leadership opportunities for teachers at scale. Data on teacher job-satisfaction reveal that practitioners feel the profession is too

stagnant, offering few options for career growth other than becoming a principal. This is particularly the case for the incoming cohort of educators from Generation Y (born between 1977–1995), who are requesting a differentiated set of choices as they move through their careers. A recent study of Gen Y teachers showed that although many of them are enthusiastic about committing their professional lives to the field of education, far fewer believe that they will stay in classroom teaching for their entire career (Coggshall, Ott, Behrstock, & Lasagna, 2009). Teachers need an avenue to grow into a recognized leadership position among their faculty while at the same time maintaining their commitment to the classroom. To the extent that teacher leadership opportunities can be made available to the most effective teachers, teacher leadership has emerged as a forward-looking approach to improving teacher quality.

## TQ CENTER RESOURCE

As part of the TQ Center mission to assist states and regional comprehensive centers with improving teacher quality for all students, a number of resources have been developed on teacher quality issues across the educator career continuum. Although teacher leadership is a newer area of focus, a small compendium of resources addresses issues relevant to this important emerging topic.

Of these, the most targeted is *Enhancing Teacher Leadership*, a TQ Center Tips & Tools Key Issue (National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, 2007). This online resource outlines 17 practical strategies for school-level leaders seeking to create greater opportunities for teacher-led change. These strategies focus on issues such as recognizing and supporting teacher leaders, creating more opportunities for teacher leadership, and eliciting the support of principals and others.

Visit <http://www2.tqsource.org/strategies/leadership/EnhancingTeacherLeadership.pdf> to access *Enhancing Teacher Leadership*.

In increasingly popular programs such as TAP: The System for Teacher and Student Advancement, classroom teachers are given the option to accept higher pay and coaching responsibilities in such roles as master and mentor teachers. More broadly, these options give teachers a chance to break through the ceiling of the profession, counteracting the widely reported issue of teachers feeling stifled by the lack of growth within the field.

Teachers who have a strong positive impact on student achievement and success must be urged to remain in teaching, and providing them with leadership positions may help to do so. But improving teacher retention is only the start. A host of components across the educator career continuum, including teacher preparation, recruitment, hiring, induction, professional development, working conditions, compensation, and performance management, comprise an effective system for managing educator talent that is comprehensive and research-driven (see Bhatt & Behrstock, 2010). Across each of these policy components, there are opportunities to strengthen the teaching profession through teacher leadership.

For example, involving teacher leaders in the recruitment and hiring process has the

potential to attract greater talent to a school or district, as teacher leaders may have a discerning eye for candidates that are likely to fit well into the school culture. At the same time, these candidates would see that opportunities for differentiated roles are available to them. Including teacher leaders in the process of teacher evaluation may lead to greater teacher buy-in to the system and the benefit of evaluation by someone who understands the context of teaching.

Evidence suggests that the quality of school leadership greatly affects teachers' working conditions and is often a determining factor when teachers decide to leave their school or the profession. Teacher leaders can assist in providing the regular, detailed feedback and support that teachers crave from instructional leaders, which will be rewarding to teacher leaders and welcomed by teachers who benefit from their leadership. This approach also will free up some time of over-burdened school principals and other administrators. Although the initial burden of changing the system may be daunting to school leaders, the outcomes are likely to pay off. In a newfound system of distributive leadership, administrators will find their school culture to be more collaborative and teacher buy-in easier to achieve.

In addition to incentivizing effective classroom teachers to remain in the profession, creating a mechanism to improve all teacher quality policy areas, and offloading some of the instructional leadership and other time-consuming responsibilities of school leaders, the idea of expanding the career path of teachers to include leadership roles is part of a larger reform conversation about advancing the profession by differentiating staffing systems within schools. At present, there is a buzz at every level of education policymaking about systems change; inserting teacher leadership

into a transformed iteration of staffing is the perfect place to start. In a concept paper titled *Toward the Structural Transformation of Schools: Innovations in Staffing*, Coggshall, Lasagna, and Laine (2009) suggest a model of neo-differentiated staffing in which teachers are staffed according to specific specializations, such as community liaison, content facilitator, technology practitioner, and instruction coach. In these individualized roles, teachers find themselves with more time to sharpen their skills and facilitate high-quality, personalized instructional opportunities for students.

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## Recommendations for State and District Action

Building a network of capable, specialized, satisfied teachers is in the best interest of the entire education community as well as the students of our nation's public school system. For leaders at the state and district levels who wish to encourage and expand teacher leadership, the following key suggestions can assist in beginning the complex but rewarding work of advancing leadership as an option for teachers:

- **Gather data on teacher preferences and aspirations.** Before launching any reform that involves teachers, collect data from teachers about their career preferences and aspirations. Be sure to target some of the questions toward both career-ladder and teacher-leadership opportunities. This approach will inform reform strategies while facilitating buy-in and raising awareness about the issue.
- **Learn from other districts/states.** Although still an emerging area of education policy, a number of districts and states have experimented with adopting new staffing structures that promote teacher leadership. Learning from their successes and challenges will guide leaders' efforts.
- **Work with the local union to expand contract options.** In some cases, collective bargaining agreements dictate the nature of the types of leadership posts that can exist. This restriction can create a time-consuming barrier to reform and so is best addressed early on in the process (see "Pathways to Teacher Leadership").
- **Begin dialogue with a local IHE to design curriculum.** Teacher leaders are not born; they are made. And coordinating with an IHE to develop a teacher leadership curriculum for preservice and inservice teachers will ensure that a cadre of capable leaders is ready to fill new positions as they are created.
- **Create a detailed plan to implement a differentiated staffing structure.** A detailed plan for transforming the staffing structure should be created in a collaborative manner with all relevant stakeholders. The plan should delineate how each type of teacher will be affected by the new system in the short and longer term and how each stage of the implementation process will be carried out to enable a smooth transition.

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## Conclusion

Most of the current emphasis on leadership centers on either the principal or superintendent as the primary leader with the greatest authority to positively affect the system.

However, it is the premise of this brief that teacher leadership is equally important, though less understood. Few studies have focused on how teacher leadership arises and the role that teacher leaders play in supporting or enhancing school reform efforts. Even fewer focus on the policies and practices of promoting and sustaining teacher leadership as a means of recruiting, retaining, and developing teachers as they progress along the educator's career continuum.

As educator effectiveness continues to dominate the agenda, states and districts are responding by developing new avenues for teacher leadership. As a recruitment and retention strategy, building out career options for teachers will help to attract a higher number of promising candidates to the field. As a staffing innovation, creating leadership positions for teachers will help practitioners begin to truly specialize in their craft and allow those with a penchant for both pedagogy and andragogy (i.e., teaching adults) to shine.

Whether it is through the development of teacher leader standards, such as in Kansas, or new certificate programs, as in Arkansas, education officials at all levels have their finger on the pulse of innovation with teacher-leadership initiatives.

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## About the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality

The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (TQ Center) was created to serve as the national resource to which the regional comprehensive centers, states, and other education stakeholders turn for strengthening the quality of teaching—especially in high-poverty, low-performing, and hard-to-staff schools—and for finding guidance in addressing specific needs, thereby ensuring that highly qualified teachers are serving students with special needs.

The TQ Center is funded by the U.S. Department of Education and is a collaborative effort of ETS, Learning Point Associates, and Vanderbilt University. Integral to the TQ Center's charge is the provision of timely and relevant resources to build the capacity of regional comprehensive centers to help states effectively implement state policy and practice by ensuring that all teachers meet the federal teacher requirements of the 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

The TQ Center is part of the U.S. Department of Education's Comprehensive Centers program, which includes 16 regional comprehensive centers that provide technical assistance to states within a specified boundary and five content centers that provide expert assistance to benefit states and districts nationwide on key issues related to ESEA.



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