

FINDING A NEW WAY:

Leveraging Teacher Leadership to Meet Unprecedented Demands

By Rachel Curtis | February 2013





THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

The Aspen Institute is an educational and policy studies organization based in Washington, DC. Its mission is to foster leadership based on enduring values and to provide a nonpartisan venue for dealing with critical issues. The Institute has campuses in Aspen, Colorado, and on the Wye River on Maryland's Eastern Shore. It also maintains offices in New York City and has an international network of partners.



THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

EDUCATION & SOCIETY PROGRAM

The Aspen Education & Society Program provides an informed and neutral forum for education practitioners, researchers, and policy leaders to engage in focused dialogue regarding their efforts to improve student achievement, and to consider how public policy changes can affect progress. Through our meetings, analysis, commissioned work, and structured networks of policymakers and practitioners, the program, for nearly 30 years, has developed intellectual frameworks on critical education issues that assist federal, state, and local policymakers working to improve American education.

Copyright © 2013 by The Aspen Institute

The Aspen Institute
One Dupont Circle, N.W.
Suite 700
Washington, DC 20036

Published in the United States of America in 2013 by The Aspen Institute

All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America
Publication Number: 13/009

FINDING A NEW WAY: Leveraging Teacher Leadership to Meet Unprecedented Demands

By Rachel Curtis | February 2013



www.aspeninstitute.org/education

About the Author

Rachel Curtis is founder and principal of Human Capital Strategies for Urban Schools. She works with school systems, higher education, and education policy and support organizations on system improvement strategy, superintendent and principal leadership development, and efforts to make teaching a compelling and rewarding career. In 2006, as assistant superintendent of the Boston Public Schools, she developed the system's teaching standards and aligned new teacher support and teacher evaluation to them. Her publications include the books *Teaching Talent*, *Strategy in Action*, *Skillful Leader II*, and *Means to an End: A Guide to Developing Teacher Evaluation Systems that Support Growth and Development*.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to Vivien Stewart who generously shared her expertise on the Singapore education systems' human capital management strategy and to the leadership at Achievement First Public Charter Schools, Denver Public Schools and District of Columbia Public Schools for sharing their work. This paper was strengthened by the invaluable feedback the following people provided on an early draft: Tamara Arroyo, Karen Baroody, Ben Boer, Sarah Coon, Jenny DeMonte, Erin Dukeshire, Candice Frontiera, Chong-Hao Fu, Bryan Hassel, Debbie Hearty, Kyle Hunsberger, Kim Levengood, Jeanette Marrone, Laura Meili, Karen Miles, Glenda Partee, Kate Pennington, Nancy Pelz-Paget, Cynthia Robinson, Joel Rose, Scott Thompson, and Butch Trusty. Linda Perlstein edited the text and Katrin Thomas and Sarah McKibben did the final close review of the text. Ross Wiener played an invaluable role as a thought partner throughout the development of the paper and as a reader of early drafts.

We are grateful to the Joyce Foundation and to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for their financial support of our work.

Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the Aspen E&S Program and do not necessarily reflect the views of these foundations.

Executive Summary

Given our newly refined ability to distinguish between teachers and their effectiveness, and the imperative brought on by the Common Core standards to deliver instruction at a more sophisticated level, it is no longer reasonable or tenable to keep treating teachers the same. Instead, school systems should provide their highest-performing teachers with leadership roles that both elevate the profession and enable them to have the greatest impact on colleagues and students.

It is not easy to implement new forms of teacher leadership meaningfully and effectively; doing so involves some profound changes to the status quo. Developing teacher leadership systems require us to rethink evaluation, compensation, distributed leadership, and even what we see as the role of teachers. Examples already have emerged, though, to show that such transformation is possible. This paper addresses what is necessary for change and how school systems might be able to achieve it.

Broadly speaking, teacher leadership is defined as 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. This paper explains why systems pursue teacher leadership strategies and why it is important to embed that work in a specific vision of what the system seeks to achieve more broadly. The vision for teacher leadership and what it can facilitate can be quite varied across school systems and may include any of the following:

- A culture of collaboration, shared accountability, and continuous improvement among adults;
- Greater capacity and commitment to differentiate instruction to meet students' needs;
- Recognition, through status and compensation, that excellent teachers can be on par with school leaders;
- New ways of organizing and delivering instruction that increase the number of students highly effective teachers reach.

What does that mean in schools and classrooms? To increase the impact of the most effective teachers, they might be put in front of the greatest number of students or the students with the greatest learning needs. They might be called on to conduct teacher evaluations and provide coaching to colleagues, which would ease the burden on principals. A teacher leader might supervise and support groups of teachers and make instructional and staffing decisions, with ultimate responsibility for the achievement of all the students the group of teachers collectively teach.

Great teachers want, and deserve, such opportunities for growth. They also deserve to be paid for them. Now that some school systems are tackling what have historically been untouchable compensation structures, pay can be aligned to teacher performance and differentiated roles. But school systems tend to graft new teacher leadership roles and compensation strategies onto old systems in ways that fall far short of meaningful transformation and are unsustainable in the long term. Thus they have trouble recruiting and retaining smart, high-achieving young adults. The job is perceived as low-status, excellent performance is not recognized, the working conditions are unsatisfying, and opportunities for greater impact and advancement are limited.

Overcoming this requires an ambitious and cohesive change agenda. Systems must 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. School systems share the same ultimate goal: increasing student achievement. But they aim to solve different problems, through different teacher leadership strategies. This paper examines a few examples:

- Denver, concerned with the insufficient capacity of teachers to increase student success, focuses teacher leadership efforts on effective teachers leading their colleagues in improvement strategies.

- Washington, D.C., concerned about being unable to recruit and retain the best teachers, focuses teacher leadership efforts on opportunities for advancement inside the classroom, additional responsibilities, and increased recognition and compensation.
- The Achievement First Public Charter Schools network, aiming to celebrate excellence in a way that keeps great teachers in the classroom, where they want to stay, designed its leadership system as a set of professional development opportunities and increased compensation.
- Singapore, facing teacher shortages and low education quality, developed an entirely new approach to human capital, including a leadership system that rates teachers' potential as part of evaluation and provides high performers opportunities around three distinct pathways: master teacher, curriculum specialist, or school leader.
- The criteria by which teachers will be identified as leaders, and what they must do to retain that designation
- What roles will be developed for teacher leaders, and how that will be decided
- How teachers will be engaged in the conversation as a leadership system is developed
- Ways to recruit and train leaders
- How teachers can be provided the time they need for collaboration and leadership
- How teacher leaders will be compensated for their skills and efforts
- How principals will be trained to foster school cultures amenable to leadership and held accountable for teacher leaders' success
- Ways to measure whether teacher leadership is improving student achievement
- Ways to pay for teacher leadership that are financially sustainable over the long term
- How innovative experiments will be balanced with systemic approaches

Reconceptualizing the roles of and incentives for teachers—much less leveraging teacher leadership to redesign the instructional delivery model and the design of schools—is transformative. But public education is an inflexible, bureaucratic institution where change tends to be incremental, piecemeal, and strongly resisted. This paper discusses how this tension can be addressed strategically—how systems can create space for innovation while pursuing incremental systemic change that removes the barriers to innovation in differentiated teaching roles, instructional delivery, and aligned incentives.

It elaborates on strategic issues that school systems creating new forms of teacher leadership will have to address as they begin the work. Among the issues:

There is not a singular, right approach to addressing any of these issues. What matters, in this time of unprecedented expectations, is that systems get started as soon as possible, and that they pursue the work intentionally and strategically, guided by an inspiring vision.

FINDING A NEW WAY:

Leveraging Teacher Leadership to Meet Unprecedented Demands

By Rachel Curtis | February 2013

Introduction

Most teachers, no matter how skilled or experienced, have basically the exact same job, and are treated the same. Exceptional work has not resulted in meaningful rewards and for a long time was not even identifiable. When districts compensate teachers based on years of service and credits earned, which have little to no connection to effectiveness, instead of improved student learning, they send a confusing message about what matters most and provide little opportunity for career growth or recognition of excellence, two things important to high performers.¹ When districts fail to use high-performing teachers to support their colleagues growth and development, administrators and coaches remain overburdened, and teachers—as well as many students—are left lacking individualized support. When systems don't put the best teachers in front of the greatest number of students or the student with the greatest learning needs, they miss a huge opportunity to increase teaching impact.

In all, school systems tend to graft new teacher leadership roles and compensation strategies onto old systems in ways that fall far short of meaningful transformation and are unsustainable in the long term. Thus they have trouble recruiting and retaining smart, high-achieving young adults. The job is perceived as low-status, excellent performance is not recognized, the working conditions are unsatisfying, and opportunities for greater impact and advancement are limited.

The Common Core State Standards give us a compelling reason and unequalled opportunity to remake the teaching profession. Ensuring that every child in the United States meets the expectations of the Common Core State Standards requires a Herculean effort, as well as fundamental changes to how teaching is organized and the roles teachers play. The standards call for sophisticated thinking, and thus sophisticated teaching. The challenges

and the opportunities are one and the same: raise teaching quality, rethink the organization of instruction and the job of teaching, and make teaching a compelling career that can compete for and retain top talent.

It is very difficult for one teacher to create differentiated, rigorous learning experiences for a classroom of 30 students who possess a wide range of knowledge and skills—particularly in ways that help them meet the high cognitive demands of the Common Core. Specialization, which is rare now in elementary and even some middle schools, could allow teachers to master and thus help students master specific curriculum areas. Technology might be used to deliver basic lessons so that teachers can focus their efforts on complex instruction, where their skills and expertise are most needed. In such a system, the most effective teachers could be given the most students to teach. And teachers might be given more time away from students. Teachers in the United States spend 80 percent of their workday directly interacting with students, compared to 60 percent in other industrialized countries.² 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.³

The Opportunity

Through new forms of teacher leadership, we may be able to transform students' learning experiences and teachers' work experiences. This requires a strategic approach that integrates evaluation systems that differentiate teacher performance and prioritize growth and development, enhanced career options for top performers early in their careers, distributed leadership in schools, compensation reform, and a reconceptualization of the roles of teachers and how instruction is delivered.

The capacity to pursue these reforms, and the need to do so, are both growing. Teacher evaluation systems that include multiple measures have improved our ability to identify highly effective teachers. Once we draw distinctions in teaching quality, we can create differentiated, dynamic roles for the most effective teachers to maximize their impact on both their students and their colleagues. And now that some school systems and their unions are tackling what have historically been untouchable compensa-

tion structures, pay can be aligned to teacher performance and differentiated roles.

When considered collectively, these developments suggest a readiness to leverage teacher leadership and differentiated roles as the catalyst of a much broader transformation of how instruction is delivered and schools

are organized. The promise lies in defining the processes that are most critical to student learning and then designing 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. Form must follow function.

For example, if we believe that well-aligned instruction and differentiated support helps accelerate learning for all students and that ongoing support and feedback to teachers is critical to their growth and development, then a highly effective teacher could be given responsibility for the achievement of a group of 80 to 100 students. She would be able to organize students, the model of instructional delivery, and staffing to best meet their needs. This might include team teaching, specialization and/or integrating technology as a teaching tool. This lead teacher would be responsible for supporting and supervising the teachers on her team.

If we believe learning increases when teachers collaborate to plan standards-based instruction, improve their pedagogical strategies, and regularly assess students to inform instruction, we could design a teacher leadership role to support this. A highly effective teacher could be given some release time to assume responsibility for leading a grade-level or content-area team (a learning com-

munity focused on planning and improving instruction based on data), providing in-classroom coaching, and evaluating the teachers on the team. In England, content-area leads and grade-level chairs are middle management positions with explicit leadership responsibilities and specific time allocations and salary increments.

Another approach might be premised on the theory that teachers' areas of greatest expertise should be used to greatest effect. For example, a teacher especially effective with struggling readers might be assigned to focus solely on them—and could reach more students in that subject by specializing, particularly if digital learning is part of the process.⁴ Additionally, she might develop a school strategy for serving students in need before they reach a point of crisis and train colleagues in literacy skills.

While imagining new roles and delivery systems for highly effective teachers will serve students better, it will also serve the profession, by making it more appealing, particular to early-career teachers, who demonstrate strong interest in leadership opportunities and dynamic career pathways.⁵ Just as important, distributing leadership more broadly in schools will ease the untenable burden on today's principals. In the long run, all of this work should be assessed by its impact on student achievement, which will require the sector to develop ways to measure the causal relationship between teacher leadership and differentiated roles and student achievement.

Reconceptualizing the roles of and incentives for teachers, and leveraging teacher leadership to redesign the instructional delivery model and the design of schools, is transformative work. But public education is an inflexible, bureaucratic institution where change tends to be incremental, piecemeal, and strongly resisted. This tension needs to be addressed strategically. In this work, the challenge and the opportunity are the same: to create space for innovation while pursuing incremental systemic change that removes the barriers to innovation in differentiated teaching roles,

The promise lies in defining the processes that are most critical to student learning and then designing teacher leadership in service of them.

Reconceptualizing the roles of and incentives for teachers, and leveraging teacher leadership to redesign the instructional delivery model and the design of schools, is transformative work.

instructional delivery, and aligned incentives. Systems that simultaneously pursue systemic change *and* innovation have the best chance of dramatically improving teaching quality and instructional delivery.

There are pockets in school systems—innovation zones, charter schools, turnaround schools—where flexibility is permitted, and all of the pieces of the puzzle can be tackled using experimentation and rapid learning to inform and support true transformation. But while they offer powerful research and development opportunities and proof points, they do not necessarily act to catalyze change throughout a district.

The work of the system, then, is to identify the incremental steps that, if taken strategically and with a clear understanding of their interconnectedness, can lead to deep and broad transformation. It is hard to think in different and expansive ways when there are so many systems and structures in place that impede the sense of possibility. As a result, we

tend to pursue improvement linearly. We tackle one piece of the puzzle at a time, or we pursue several individual pieces concurrently but separately, without fully considering how to arrange them collectively to maximize their impact.

The school systems highlighted in this paper were chosen for their commonalities (prioritizing both teacher quality and teacher leadership) as well as their differences (centralized vs. decentralized approach to teacher leadership, large urban vs. charter vs. international, strong culture of teaming and collaboration vs. an individualistic orientation). With the exception of Singapore, these systems are at the very beginning of their work in designing and implementing teacher career pathways that retain top talent and address critical student learning needs. They have not done enough in this arena to have results to measure, but they still have much to teach us about the complexities of pursuing this work on the ground.

Denver Public Schools

Denver Public School (DPS) introduced a voluntary teacher leadership initiative in the 2010-11 school year. The goals of the initiative are to address system and school priorities, support teachers to lead their colleagues, and build a culture in which teachers own both their school's problems and the solutions.

Principals nominate teachers for these roles, which they hold alongside their full-time teaching responsibilities. Teachers receive an annual \$500 stipend and extra hourly pay for work done outside of the school day. Principals can supplement this at their own discretion. Three years into the work, approximately 500 teachers have assumed leadership roles in 140 schools (out of 162 schools total, including charters), with most maintaining full-time classroom teaching responsibilities as well.

Currently, the system relies on principals' judgment about the critical knowledge, skills, and dispositions required for success in these roles, and provides the teacher leaders with training and support. Once the district's teacher growth and development system provides evaluation ratings, starting in 2013-14, these ratings will be considered in the identification of teacher leaders.

The district defined two required foci for teacher leadership work: supporting DPS's new teacher growth and development system, called LEAP, and preparing for the implementation of the Common Core standards. Principals are also invited to identify additional school-specific work they want teacher leaders to focus on based on their school improvement plans. As a result, the work of DPS teacher leaders is wide-ranging. It includes observing teachers and giving them formative feedback using the system's teaching framework, mentoring and coaching new teachers, leading data team discussions, becoming expert in the new standards and helping develop standards-aligned units with colleagues, and facilitating professional development in any of the above areas.

DPS training for teacher leaders includes a weeklong summer institute and monthly after-school sessions. Teacher leaders can choose from five strands of study, based on their needs and the work they lead in their school: Standards Content Language Arts, Standards Content Mathematics, Leading Teams, Instructional Coaching and Mentoring, and Student Voice and Engagement.

There has been much discussion in recent years about how to leverage highly effective teachers to address critical issues impeding student learning and make teaching a more appealing career, including development of Teacher Leader Model Standards.⁶ But there is little to show for all this conversation. Yet right now, organizations such as Education Resource Strategies⁷, Public Impact (through its Opportunity Culture initiative), Leading Educators⁸, and Teach Plus⁹ are pursuing innovative ideas that create an opportunity to focus and accelerate this work. To support these efforts, this paper builds on earlier work and lays out a way to think about teacher leadership that supports transformation both through incremental movement and more aggressive, small-scale direct pursuit.

Teacher Leadership: What Do We Want to Accomplish?

For the purposes of this paper, teacher leadership is defined as 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. This definition conjures up images of teachers as innovators, researchers, champions of student learning, leaders of colleagues, and policy advocates. The dynamism of teacher leadership serves as a lever for recruiting and retaining top talent, strengthening the most effective teachers, helping other teachers improve, distributing leadership, and experimenting with new ways of organizing instruction so that teaching roles are differentiated and the teachers with proven ability reach more students.

Systems building new teacher leadership models must clearly identify the problems they aim to solve and define a compelling vision for how this can accelerate student learning and help them recruit and retain top talent. To problem-solve without a vision is short-sighted; serially hopping from one problem to the next fails to fix systemic problems at their roots. At the same time, pursuing a vision without solving existing problems doesn't address the underlying impediments to true transformation.

Solving Problems

There are many reasons to develop a comprehensive system of teacher leadership (see box). In the District of Columbia Public Schools, the system is

WHY TEACHER LEADERS?

Reasons districts may pursue teacher leadership include:

- Further developing top talent
- Helping other teachers improve
- More effectively implementing key priorities, like Common Core
- Building a pipeline to the principalship
- Distributing leadership in schools
- Increasing highly effective teachers' impact on student learning
- Making principals' span of supervision manageable

trying recruit and retain top teaching talent. Denver Public Schools is trying to build teacher capacity in priority areas, to move from pockets of excellence to a system of excellence. Districts might be trying to reduce some of the instructional leadership burden placed on principals, or increase effective teachers' reach by putting them in front of more students, or more effectively implement the Common Core. These purposes may be intertwined. For example, focusing teacher leadership on Common Core implementation allows systems to further develop and tap the skills of teacher leaders in service of other teachers' learning, which can build long-term capacity.

The problem(s) a system is trying to solve through teacher leadership will vary based on context—its needs, capacity, culture, support for innovation and experimentation, and teacher and union attitudes, among other issues.

Pursuing a Vision

Pursuing teacher leadership to solve short-term problems allows for the possibility of a longer-term, transformative effect, if the work is driven by a powerful vision of what teacher leadership can realize and how it can be sustained. That allows teacher leadership to serve as a driver of systemic improvement and transformation and be a core commitment on which the district organizes rather than just another initiative, pursued for a time before being set aside or slowly eroded.

The vision for teacher leadership and what it can facilitate can be quite varied across school systems and may include any of the following:

- A culture of collaboration, shared accountability, and continuous improvement among adults
- Greater capacity and commitment to differentiate instruction to meet students' needs
- Recognition, through status and compensation, that excellent teachers can be on par with school leaders
- New ways of organizing and delivering instruction that increase the number of students highly effective teachers reach

Clarifying at the outset both the problems to be solved and the vision to be pursued helps ensure that teacher leadership supports both. For example, if we think the problem is our inability to recruit and retain excellent teachers, and we hold a larger vision

Clarifying at the outset both the problems and the vision helps ensure that teacher leadership supports both.

of effective schools as places where teachers collaborate, share students, work in teams with differentiated roles, and hold one another accountable for student learning and contributions to the team, our teacher leadership strategy will address both. We will create teacher

leadership opportunities that foster collaboration and mutual accountability, and we will consider how collaboration can make the job more attractive.

Developing a theory of action that links the problems and the vision encourages coherence among the actions to be taken and the outcomes to be achieved. It gives us a chance to check to see if our reasoning is sound and to assess the audacity of what we are trying to achieve. The school systems in Denver and Washington, D.C., have the same ultimate goal—increasing student achievement—but their definitions of the problems they are trying to solve lead to very different teacher leadership strategies. Denver, concerned with the insufficient capacity of teachers to increase student success, is focused on effective teachers leading their colleagues in improvement strategies. D.C., concerned that it is unable to recruit and retain the best and the brightest teachers, is focused on opportunities for

TWO THEORIES OF ACTION

Denver and D.C. have different explanations for the theories of action underlying their teacher leadership systems:

If the Denver Public Schools builds the capacity of its most effective teachers to lead their colleagues in implementing school-specific improvement strategies (aligned to their Unified Improvement Plan), then schools across the district will achieve increased student academic success.

If the District of Columbia Public Schools provides high-performing teachers with opportunities for advancement inside the classroom, as well as additional responsibility and increased recognition and compensation, then the system will build its capacity to recruit and retain top talent which will then lead to dramatically increased student achievement.

advancement inside the classroom, additional responsibilities, and increased recognition and compensation.

If teacher leadership is going to drive system transformation, it needs to be tightly integrated with the system's other critical priorities and drivers. For example, Denver is focusing teacher leadership on systemic priorities like Common Core implementation. In addition to curricular and instructional priorities, other systemic priorities that can be served by teacher leadership include reconceptualizing support for the lowest-performing schools and students and implementing evaluation systems that support teacher growth and development.

Early Considerations

School systems creating new forms of teacher leadership will need to set up a series of systems and structures and consider a range of strategic issues. By what criteria will teachers be identified? Will teachers play a role in determining how to set up leadership systems? How can teacher leaders—and the colleagues they coach—be given the time they need without breaking the bank? How will districts know if teacher leaders are improving student achievement?

District of Columbia Public Schools

The Leadership Initiative for Teachers (LIFT) in the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) grows directly out of the district's teacher evaluation system. Based on their performance on evaluations, teachers progress through a five-step career ladder that includes recognition through compensation and access to leadership opportunities. DCPS's goals for LIFT are to retain top performers, reward experience, broaden recognition, and increase career stability.

Teachers progress through the stages—Teacher, Established Teacher, Advanced Teacher, Distinguished Teacher, and Expert Teacher—through a series of “highly effective” or “effective” ratings on evaluations. A teacher can move from the first to the fifth stage in as little as six years, through consistent ratings of highly effective. Two years of highly effective ratings are required to move through each of the later steps: from Advanced to Distinguished and from Distinguished to Expert.

DCPS's compensation system is aligned to LIFT; teachers at the Advanced, Distinguished, and Expert stages earn significantly larger base salary increases. This alignment of the compensation system to performance and the fact that a teacher can achieve Expert status in six to eight years allows high-performing teachers with less than a decade of experience to earn salaries previously reserved for longtime teachers with the greatest accumulation of graduate credits.

LIFT also provides incentives for the most effective teachers in the system to work in the highest-needs schools. Regardless of what stage of LIFT teachers are at, those with highly effective ratings can accelerate the pace of increases to their base salaries and earn up to \$25,000 in bonuses for teaching a high-stakes testing grade in a high-poverty, low-performing school. In a low-poverty school, a highly effective teacher earns only a \$3,000 bonus. Three-quarters of DCPS teachers work in high-poverty schools. As a way to accelerate the base salaries of the Advanced, Distinguished, and Expert Teachers among them, DCPS provides service credits, meaning those teachers are paid as if they had been working in the system for more years.

Teachers at every performance level can pursue leadership opportunities. Some of the opportunities are available to teachers at any stage of the career ladder, while others are reserved for teachers at the higher stages. While schools have the autonomy to develop their own leadership opportunities, central office offerings include:

- Sitting on the chancellor's Teachers' Cabinet, a group that meets monthly to provide input on policy
- Providing leadership related to the Common Core State Standards and other district curriculum initiatives
- Serving as the point of contact for a school's services to students who are English language learners or struggling learners
- Receiving fellowship, grants, and travel opportunities with external partners
- Participating in teacher recruitment and selection
- Coaching and mentoring
- Organizing monthly meet-ups by content or grade level

The 37 leadership opportunities listed in the LIFT 2012-13 guidebook all require an application, a nomination by the teacher's principal, and/or prerequisite training. Teachers who pursue certain opportunities are provided additional training. Some of the opportunities pay a stipend, and a few require teachers to leave full-time classroom teaching.

Identifying Teacher Leaders

A teacher's designation as a leader is a strategic matter. In most systems, the argument for teacher leadership is that some teachers are more effective than others and that their talents should be recognized, nurtured, and leveraged. For this to happen, we need to clearly define what these talents are and ensure that the teachers who assume leadership roles possess them. Criteria for teacher leaders can include earning a strong evaluation rating, building collaboration among colleagues, understanding adult learning theory and applying it to teaching other teachers, and possessing high credibility with colleagues.

Singapore, a country that recruits and retains a highly effective teaching workforce and offers a dynamic career pathway, considers teachers' current performance and their estimated potential when considering them for leadership roles. Leadership potential is assessed based on feedback from teacher leaders and administrators who work with teachers; teachers who are thought to have high leadership potential are given additional training and support and encouraged to assume more

responsibilities. There isn't a single right way to approach teacher leadership criteria, but it is critical that a system pursuing teacher leadership seeks its own answer and communicate it to teachers and the broader community.

Systems often have to both define the foundational criteria any teach-

er must meet to be considered a teacher leader and the particular criteria required of specific roles, if different roles are available. The skills needed to mentor and coach teachers are quite different from those needed to deliver instruction to 100 students, deploy and manage colleagues, or oversee digital instruction.

Regardless of the way teachers are designated, it is important to decide the duration of the designation. Is a teacher always a teacher leader once identified, or is there some level of performance that must be maintained to reaffirm the status? In D.C., teachers are placed on one of five stages of a career pathway

based on their evaluation ratings. A teacher's ability to move up the career ladder is informed each year by his or her annual evaluation rating: Teachers designated "effective" and "highly effective" are able to move up, while "developing" or "minimally effective" teachers may not.¹⁰ At each stage, there are certain leadership opportunities teachers can choose. A teacher's stage on the career pathway is reassessed every year for teachers at the first two stages of the career pathway and every other year for teachers at the third, fourth, and fifth stages.

Creating Capacity

A system can build leadership capacity among its teaching force in several different ways. The approach may change over time as the leadership work grows and evolves. Capacity-building strategies include:

- Identifying people who meet the leadership criteria and providing them ongoing training on content and leadership skills;
- Integrating leadership competencies into the teacher recruitment and screening process so that leadership capacity can be considered in hiring decisions;
- Moving teachers and teacher candidates who have demonstrated leadership right into leadership roles, while targeting teachers with high potential for skills development in anticipation of future leadership roles.

These strategies are not mutually exclusive, and it is likely that a school system will enter into teacher leadership work employing one or more of them and integrating others over time. The differences in the strategies relate to the breadth and depth of teacher leadership each builds and the extent to which the system wants to play a significant role in building leadership capacity. Each approach has broader implications for hiring practices, resources allocation, and the capacity that needs to be built in the human resources and training and development departments or outsourced.

Defining Roles

The roles teacher leaders assume are often defined by systemic needs. To ensure the teacher leadership work serves a transformative vision, there must

Is a teacher always a teacher leader once identified, or is there some level of performance that must be maintained to reaffirm the status?

also be opportunities to think boldly about what teacher leaders might do that would represent a significant shift. Systems must consider:

- What is the most important work that needs to be done to improve student learning?
- How can teacher leaders address these needs?
- Is there a set of clearly defined roles or are there broad categories of work into which roles must fit?
- Who—the system, principals, teachers—decides what the roles will be?
- Do different roles focus on different skills—for instance, a role that requires deep curricular expertise vs. one that emphasizes leading colleagues vs. one entirely focused on reaching more students?
- Do the criteria for different roles vary, or are the same criteria used but weighted in different ways?

One challenge confronting virtually every system is the transition to Common Core standards. There is no reasonable chance of meeting these expectations without engaging many more teachers in leading this work. Facilitating professional learning, specializing in difficult and highly valued instruction, freeing up time of principals and other administrators: all these could advance both teacher leadership and Common Core implementation.

Another common challenge facing school systems is the implementation of new teacher evaluation systems that emphasize multiple observations and frequent feedback. Evaluations with meaningful and actionable feedback are a great asset to teachers, especially as they aim to implement the Common Core, but they also represent one of the greatest demands on principals' time. As it is, employee-to-evaluator ratios are much greater in education than in the private sector.¹¹ Engaging teacher leaders as peer observers and coaches could ameliorate the burden on principals and maximize the likelihood that evaluation will realize its potential to drive teacher growth and development.

Compensating Teacher Leaders

Most systems with a compensation system based on years of service and credits earned simply add

compensation for teacher leadership work to the existing pay schedule, at least initially. Denver, for instance, provides teacher leaders a \$500 annual stipend and hourly pay for work done, which principals have the opportunity to enhance.

It is important that systems allocate funds in a way that reflects both what they value and what they need. Systems need to decide (in consultation with the teachers union where applicable) how much they want to compensate teacher leaders and for what they want to compensate them. They might set a straight contracted rate for hours worked, a modest stipend outside of strict union hourly pay guidelines, or a fixed percentage of the teachers' salary. Districts vary widely in both approaches and amounts; pay for mentoring new teachers ranges from \$750 in some districts to, in others, 7 percent of annual salary (which can total thousands of dollars).

The question of what systems want to compensate teacher leaders for adds another level of complexity. Teacher leaders can be compensated for their performance and/or the additional roles and responsibilities they assume. D.C. has reoriented its compensation system so that it is based on levels of performance as defined by teacher evaluation, which also serves as the gateway to leadership opportunities. While teachers can earn stipends for assuming leadership roles, the bulk of their additional compensation is tied to their performance evaluation rating and for working in high-poverty, low-performing schools. D.C. designed its performance-based pay system within the constraints of a traditional lockstep salary scale, allowing highly effective teachers to earn annual bonuses and repeat high performers to be accelerated along the steps-and-lanes salary scale.

In Baltimore City Public Schools, teacher leaders, called "model teachers," receive a salary increase that can exceed \$20,000 for successfully completing a peer review process. The district's expectation is that once a teacher is designated a model teacher, he or she takes on some responsibility in addition to normal teaching duties (though the central office does not monitor whether this happens). At Green Dot Public Schools, a teacher's ability to realize the highest performance rating is contingent on assuming a leadership role. These approaches reflect different definitions of teacher leadership and expectations of teacher leaders. They also have very different financial implications.

The Intentional Use of Time

It takes time for a teacher to do leadership work: leading a team, coaching and evaluating staff, building colleagues' knowledge and skills around the Common Core. Additionally, it takes time to train and support teacher leaders. In much of the teacher leadership work to date, we have not tackled this issue head-on. Instead, we've layered leadership responsibilities on top of full-time teaching loads. That simultaneously burdens teacher leaders and limits how much they can do and how effective they can be—a combination that can ultimately lead to burn-out. Professional development for teacher leaders is often nonexistent or piecemeal, a few days in the summer followed by monthly afterschool meetings, yet systems expect their work to be transformative.

The teachers who are the focus of teacher leaders efforts also need time. Teachers working with peer evaluators need time to meet before and after observations and to visit colleagues to learn from them. Teamwork based on co-planning, co-teaching, and close review of student work and data takes time, too. The time required of teacher leaders and the teachers they work with might be afforded through release time during the day, a longer school day with more time devoted to collaboration, and extending the school year.¹² Or it is plausible that net costs would not have to increase at all, given the potential for creative thinking about staffing and school organization made possible by innovations in instructional technology, school staffing models, and financial modeling. However districts manage it, providing the time needed for teacher leadership roles would not just help student outcomes but would also have valuable implications for the profession, as teachers surveyed often say working conditions and job satisfaction are just as important as pay.¹³

Differentiating Among Teachers

Teaching is a profoundly flat profession. The little differentiation that exists among teachers has historically been defined based on *what* they do—the students they teach, the subjects they teach—and how long they've done it. New teacher evaluation systems allow differentiation among teachers based on *how well* they do. Teacher leadership efforts invite us to think expansively about the variety of ways we can differentiate among teachers, potentially helping schools serve students and support adults better. The artistry lies in differentiating in a

way that supports the system's overall goals and vision, addresses specific problems, and nurtures a healthy culture among colleagues. Perhaps the greatest tension that exists in differentiating teacher roles relates to simultaneously providing leadership opportunities for the highest-performing teachers that tap and further develop their expertise while also nurturing leadership in *all* teachers to ensure a culture of efficacy, responsibility, risk-taking, and continuous improvement.

Differentiation relates, in part, to the extent to which a system creates career pathways. Pathways offer a leadership roadmap, which outlines how teachers can develop and advance through the system and may include several stops along the way.

The education sector's work on developing career pathways is nascent and is a long way from providing the opportunities for continuous learning and dynamic work of, say, the medical profession. In medicine, doctors progress through internships and residencies in which they assume more and more responsibility, working as part of a team under the watchful eye of a more experienced doctor. They then often pursue fellowships for deeper study and practice. Training is ongoing and embedded in doctors' work, and they can pursue one or more of several pathways, including clinical work, research, and teaching. (While the medical profession offers an instructive example, a notable difference is that the field of medicine is not bound by union negotiations the way the education sector often is.)

As teachers progress along the five stages of D.C.'s performance framework, they can pursue additional leadership roles facilitated by the central office, schools, or external partners; teachers decide what roles they are interested in. Achievement First Public Charter Schools in the Northeast operate on the idea that excellent teaching is leadership; their career pathway does not require leaving the classroom. Denver initiated its teacher leadership work differently. It introduced specific leadership opportunities and invited principals to suggest others. Then principals nominated teachers for those

Now that teacher evaluation systems bring to light the fact that some teachers get better results than others, it is natural to ask whether every teacher, regardless of performance, should do the same job.

roles. This approach is more binary and driven by the system and principals: A teacher is either asked to formally assume leadership or she is not. This makes it hard for a teacher to know how she could assume a teacher leadership role if not selected.

Now that teacher evaluation systems bring to light the fact that some teachers get better results than others, it is natural to ask whether every teacher, regardless of performance, should do the same job. Or should their duties be differentiated, as they

Achievement First Charter Management Organization

Achievement First explains its theory of action regarding human capital as follows:

If we lay out a five-stage career pathway that recognizes excellent teachers and provides them professional growth opportunities, increased compensation, and recognition then we will provide a meaningful trajectory for teachers who decide to make their long-term career impact from within the classroom, and we will develop, reward and retain effective educators.

Achievement First's teacher career pathway grew out of a desire to recognize the critical role of highly effective classroom teachers and to provide teachers a trajectory toward exceptional practice that they could grow through with the support of their supervisors. As the organization describes it, the goals of its pathway are to increase student achievement, and to develop and retain excellent teachers by:

- *Celebrating excellence in the teaching profession through recognition and reward*
- *Investing in the ongoing support and development of teachers at all stages of their careers*
- *Setting clear standards for instructional excellence and providing frequent training and feedback to help teachers learn and grow*
- *Developing schools with strong teams of teachers working together for student success*

The focus of the career pathway is on growth and has five stages: Intern, Stage 2 Teacher, Stage 3 Teacher, Distinguished Teacher, and Master Teacher. Progression from one stage to the next comes with increased compensation, recognition, and differentiated growth opportunities. The emphasis on growth is evident in the list of benefits afforded to the Stage 4 and 5 teachers:

- Self-directed professional development budget
- Participation in a network-wide distinguished/master teacher cohort
- Opportunities to observe high-performing schools and teachers regionally or nationally
- Preferred access to special professional development experiences
- Opportunity to formally partner with Team Teaching and Learning on curriculum and professional development
- Opportunity to serve as a coach and receive coach training

Almost all of the benefits focus on additional professional development and learning opportunities. There is no emphasis on teachers assuming leadership roles beyond their teaching as they progress through the career pathway. This reflects Achievement First's belief that the greatest leadership a teacher can exercise rests in the quality of her classroom instruction. It also reflects that AF already has a clear leadership pipeline towards school administration. Teachers can assume responsibilities as teacher coaches and grade-level chairs, academic deans, principals-in-residence, and ultimately principals. People in each of these roles participate in role-specific professional development, are part of a cohort group, and receive regular feedback from their supervisor to support growth and development.

often are in other professions? Can teachers who are especially effective in the classroom be given responsibility for instructing more students or other teachers? Does this mean other teachers are given less responsibility? Could teachers in their early years be given less teaching responsibility, as a form of apprenticeship? Would this improve and speed up their chances for meeting the criteria for teacher leadership? Likewise, could weaker teachers be given less classroom time, and build it back up as they get the necessary support? Delineating teacher leadership allows every school system to ask these questions—which will likely raise interesting dilemmas related to a seeming widespread labor presence and those without this presence) to treat all people in the same employee group similarly. These questions also highlight the importance of developing a teacher leadership system that is flexible and responsive.

Communicating With and Engaging Teachers

Teachers have a critical role to play in developing teacher leadership and career pathways to ensure we create systemic, sustainable, and scalable models. Engaging teachers in this conversation and in shaping the elements of career pathways provides different perspectives that will undoubtedly strengthen the work and ensure it responds to the real needs of students, teachers, and schools. Doing so shows teachers they are valued, invites them to dream, and builds engagement and ownership, which are essential to effective implementation.

Given how little flexibility teachers have in their current roles, and how much high-potential, high-performing teachers desire more flexibility and autonomy, they would welcome an invitation to think expansively. They can imagine how they could best help their students and contribute to school and systemic improvement. Engaging teachers in this conversation can be tricky, of course, if teacher quality is poor to begin with. Don't ask the weakest teachers what would make them stay; ask the top talent who you seek to retain, or—if there is not enough top talent to ask—talk to teachers who choose not to work in the system about why they don't. When the system seeks and hears the voices of the teachers it most values, those teachers are more likely to feel valued and inspired, and it is more likely the leadership work will reflect what great teachers want and need.

When the work moves from talk to action, here again teachers have a critical role to play. They are the people who have to bridge the reality gap between central office's good ideas and intentions and the daily realities of classrooms and schools. When teachers partner in this work, they help shape realistic, responsive strategies and anticipate the barriers to successful implementation. High-performing teachers of different backgrounds and school types should be engaged, so that the response developed addresses a wide range of interests and needs.

Effective rollout of a teacher career pathway and differentiated roles requires careful communication to engage all of the teachers who weren't involved in the design. This can be a powerful opportunity for learning or a missed opportunity that undercuts the entire endeavor. Communication needs to be clear and frequent, laying out the vision the system has for teachers and their growth and addressing the concerns teachers have in the face of changes that can impact their standing and compensation. Most importantly, it must continually articulate that supporting students and their learning is the core value undergirding the design.

Considerations to Ensure Impact and Sustainability

School Leadership and School Culture

Principals, as the keepers of school culture, hold the key to whether teacher leadership can flourish in their buildings. They can support teachers to develop the leadership skills that can make them unstoppable, or they can let potential lie fallow. They can see teacher leaders as partners who can relieve them from some of their overwhelming responsibilities, or they can see them as a challenge to their authority. For this reason, systems need to think explicitly about the knowledge, skills, and habits of mind principals need to support teacher leadership.

Principals, as the keepers of school culture, hold the key to whether teacher leadership can flourish in their buildings.

To the extent that systems want principals developing and leveraging teacher leadership at the school

level, principals need to deeply understand what drives student learning, have a clear-eyed assessment of where their schools stand, and be able to think creatively about ways to recruit or develop top talent to lead this work. They need to understand what motivates high performers and create those conditions in their schools. They need to build systems to support and develop the leadership skills of high performers, hold teachers accountable as they assume more leadership responsibilities, and think creatively about staffing and the delivery of instruction. They need to know how to create and support high-functioning teams and develop a schedule that allows for meaningful collaboration. They need to know how to delineate roles, set clear expectations, and track progress. And they must be willing to share leadership and management responsibilities that have historically been their sole purview.

Principals' daily behaviors can either support or undercut a culture of teacher leadership and collaboration. Do teacher leaders facilitate meetings, or is the principals always the facilitator? Does the principal hold all teachers accountable for engaging with teacher leaders as they are expected to, or is the message communicated that this is optional? Does the principal measure her own success in part on the success of the teacher leaders in the school, or does she perceive their efforts to be unrelated to her own?

As systems embark on teacher leadership work, it is essential that they develop strategies—through professional development, supervision, and evaluation—to address the capacity of principals and hold them accountable for supporting this work.

Financial Sustainability

How to afford teacher leadership systems is one of the thorniest issues in this conversation, but also one of the most important to address. Building compensation for teacher leadership on top of existing compensation structures is often the most politically feasible way to tackle the issue, but it is not financially sustainable. In a time of constrained resources, teacher leader compensation should be organized so that it does not demand any net increase in overall expenditures. Many school districts leading the work in teacher leadership are underwriting their efforts with grant funds. This approach either buys districts time to figure out a financial model that is sustainable or sets them up to hit a dead end when the grant money runs out.

Teacher leadership can be made more financially feasible by tying compensation to additional roles and responsibilities that are attached to existing resource streams, such as federal Title I or Title II professional development funds. If a district wants enduring sustainability, though, it might need to make more profound changes—for instance, paying teachers based on leadership roles rather than years of service and credits earned, or using technology-based instructional delivery models that reduce the overall number of teachers, leaving funds to pay teacher leaders more without expanding overall costs.¹⁴

Balancing Innovation and a Systemic Approach

Innovation tends to sprout from small-scale experiments, many of which happen far from the center of public school bureaucracies. Systemic improvement happens when the central office creates the structures and systems that support the improvement. To make meaningful progress in teacher leadership, systems must pursue both innovation and systemic reform and think strategically about what they hold loose with limited regulation to support innovation and what they hold tight with clear expectations to ensure integrity.

Innovation and experimentation provide the opportunity to try out ideas, learn from and refine those efforts, and expand the most promising of them. This work creates proof points about how teacher leadership can be leveraged to provide new ways of organizing instruction to meet all students' needs and to make teaching a dynamic and rewarding career. Embedded in the experimentation and innovation are lessons that can inform the more incremental system-wide teacher leadership work. Start-up and turnaround schools, as well as schools with an extended day, are fertile ground for innovation in rethinking teaching roles and teacher leadership. As systems look for opportunities to seed innovation, the critical criterion is confidence in those leading the effort: school principals, teacher leaders, central office administrators, and others.

The Boston Public Schools Turnaround Teacher Teams (T3) provides an example of a small-scale experiment that could inform teacher leadership work more broadly. Partnering with Teach Plus, a nonprofit organization that provides policy fellowships for teachers, the district supported highly effective teachers to become turnaround leaders and placed them in teams in persistently

Singapore

By Vivien Stewart, Senior Advisor for Education, Asia Society

In less than half a century since its independence in 1965, Singapore has transformed itself from a poor developing country with no natural resources to a vibrant modern economy and global business leader. Education—in particular a high-quality teaching and school leadership profession—has been key to its impressive performance. Since 2000, Singapore’s students have been consistently high performers on international assessments.

It wasn’t always so. In earlier times, Singapore had significant teacher shortages and low educational quality, but in the 1990s the Ministry of Education developed a comprehensive plan to attract high-quality people into education and support them in their work. Over time a series of steps were taken, including recruiting teachers from the top one-third of academic performers, benchmarking salaries to those of other college graduates, strengthening teacher training, providing universal induction programs, giving each teacher 100 hours of professional development a year, publicly recognizing teachers as nation-builders, and, very importantly, systematically developing career paths that enable teachers to build their skills and responsibilities over time and that create the capacity for high-quality teaching and learning in every school.

Talented teachers cannot be expected to stay in the same role for 30 years. To support a dynamic career path, teachers’ annual evaluations rate both current performance and “current estimated potential.” Senior teachers and administrators who have worked with the teacher contribute to the potential rating, which is used to identify teachers who should be developed and tapped for additional opportunities and responsibilities. As part of the career pathway strategy, after three years of teaching in Singapore, teachers express interest in and are assessed for their potential for one of three different career paths: master teacher, curriculum specialist, or school leader. Progress along each of these paths is supported by a wide range of professional development and training opportunities and is based on performance. Each step comes with salary increases; in fact, a master teacher or senior specialist can earn as much as a principal.

Senior teachers play major leadership roles in their schools. They mentor new teachers, observe classrooms, create model lessons, run professional learning communities, and help teachers develop their annual goals and professional development plans in the context of the school’s strategic plan and their own performance evaluation. Teacher evaluations, which were developed with input from teachers and are conducted by senior teachers and principals, are based on a broad range of outcomes, including student development, teachers’ professional contribution to the school, and their relationships to communities and parents.

To keep up with the rapidly changing knowledge economy, Singapore has recently been expanding beyond its traditional strengths in knowledge transmission to incorporate 21st century skills and a wider range of pedagogies and uses of technology. Senior teachers lead these efforts in their own schools and help to spread best practices across the system through the Singapore Academy of Teachers. Principals and senior teachers also scan the globe for best practices and bring them back to Singapore. The trade-off for this intensive focus on professional development is larger class sizes, but Singapore has very low attrition rates of teachers: 3 percent, compared to almost 50 percent in some parts of the United States at the end of the first five years. Surveys of Singapore teachers show that they stay in the profession because of decent compensation, positive school cultures with a strong sense of mission, and the wide range of opportunities for professional growth and leadership. Teacher leaders play a key role in schools’ capacity to deliver high-quality teaching and learning and in the continuous improvement and purposeful innovation ethic that underlies Singapore’s high educational performance.

underperforming schools. T3 teachers receive ongoing professional development and then train teachers in data and lead them in inquiry-based discussions about improving instruction and student outcomes. They are paid a \$6,000 stipend for this work. So far, schools using T3 teachers as part of a comprehensive turnaround strategy realized greater student growth than other Massachusetts schools.¹⁵ Should the district want to expand or institutionalize this initiative in a financially sustainable way, it would likely have to reconceptualize how school resources are spent and how teachers are compensated.

The systemic work, when done well, creates the bedrock for system-wide implementation as new roles are defined and codified, a career pathway is laid out, and compensation is aligned. In D.C., the system has held tight and defined centrally the stages of the career pathway, the performance levels required to move from one stage to the next, and the compensation system aligned to these stages. Conversely, the system has very loose expectations of what specific work is expected of teachers whose performance puts them at the higher stages of the career pathway. The system has identified a series of roles teachers can pursue at each stage of the career pathway, but teachers are not required to pursue these roles. The one exception to this looseness is the bonuses of up to \$25,000 that teachers at the highest stages of the career ladder can earn for working in high-needs schools and grades and subjects with high-stakes tests; the system uses these bonuses to address a critical need.

In balancing innovation and a systemic approach, the trick is to create maximum flexibility for teachers, schools, and the system to support innovation in teacher leadership and learn from it before making consequential decisions with long-term implications. This means not codifying roles, compensation, and so on in ways that may restrict the work as it evolves towards the system's transformative vision. Denver faces this dilemma as it thinks about integrating its nascent teacher leadership work with ProComp, the system's collectively bargained compensation system. The district wants schools and the system as a whole to have the time and space they need to try different approaches related to teacher leadership, learn from them, and then synthesize the learning to shape future efforts. It is concerned about making agreements about specific teacher leadership roles and compensation

that limit the possibilities of what the system can do over the longer term. The artistry lies in thinking outside of the existing boxes without inadvertently creating new boxes that are just as constraining as what they replace.

In getting the balance right between innovation and systemic improvement, there is a tension about who sets the agenda for the work of teacher leaders. Is teacher leadership serving system initiatives, such as implementation of the Common Core? Can individual schools create their own forms of teacher leadership? Are teachers invited to propose the types of leadership they want to pursue? Regardless of how a system answers these questions, it is paramount that a shared understanding of the purpose and goals of teacher leadership guides the efforts and that they are pursued within a defined framework to ensure integrity. It is similarly important that the system gathers knowledge about what works and what does not.

Relating Teacher Leadership Efforts to System Culture

Teacher leadership has the potential to be a powerful shaper of culture. A critical decision school systems need to make is whether they want the teacher leadership work to strengthen an existing culture or to be a dynamic force in changing it. By thinking explicitly about how to design teacher leadership work to support the desired culture, systems position themselves to get the most out of their leadership efforts.

At Achievement First, the teacher career pathway was very carefully designed to reinforce a culture of tremendous regard for teaching excellence. Before the pathway was introduced, AF was concerned that the only leadership opportunities available to teachers pulled them away from the classroom, where many strong teachers wanted to stay. The career pathway was designed so leaders could stay in the classroom yet be recognized for their excellence and earn salaries comparable to those of school administrators. In Denver, the early work in teacher leadership focuses on creating a culture of leadership among all teachers, by encouraging them to assume leadership and think of themselves as leaders. To do this, the system needed to make some leadership opportunities accessible broadly and to clearly define what teachers do daily that are acts of leadership.

Systems that are committed to a culture of continuous adult learning and collaboration may screen potential teacher leaders for demonstrated growth and improvement, curiosity, and interpersonal leadership skills to ensure they are able to support this culture. When systems are trying to establish or maintain a culture of experimentation and risk-taking, they will want to provide teachers and principal the opportunity to design leadership roles and a way to track learning.

Evaluation of Teacher Leadership Efforts

The depth of commitment to teacher leadership proposed in this paper requires a strong strategy for evaluating these efforts to ensure that they are making a clear, positive impact on student learning and to support mid-course corrections to maximize impact. This endeavor is complicated by the challenges of drawing a direct correlation between teacher leadership efforts and student achievement. Because so many factors contribute to improved results, it is hard to tease out the effects of just one, such as teacher leadership. Furthermore, student results will be measured long after the teacher leadership work is initiated. For these reasons, evaluation of teacher leadership efforts needs to include formative measures, benchmarks, and the use of the disciplines of inquiry and improvement science.¹⁶

For example, a district might assess interim progress of a team led by a teacher leader by looking at whether structures for collaboration are in place, whether there are clear expectations for what teachers are expected to do together and how their work will be assessed, and whether, how, and how often they are reviewing instruction and student work. In developing interim measures, it is essential to address both outputs and outcomes. Output measures are process measures, assessing if things get done. Did the peer evaluator observe a specified number of teachers in November and have coaching sessions with each teacher? Is the teacher team meeting twice a week guided by a curriculum, with each meeting following an agenda? Outcome measures examine the impact of the outputs. For example, when the teacher leader identified an area of focus for a colleague during their November meeting, did that teacher demonstrate improvement in that skill at the next observation? When a team

focused on rigor, did teacher-assigned tasks and students' responses improve discernably?

The use of inquiry and short-cycle improvement efforts allows us to ask (and answer) in real time if we're doing a good job and what we can learn to strengthen our overall approach. When some peer evaluators' charges are realizing significant growth and others' are not, what is different about the coaches' practice? The learnings from this inquiry can then inform peer observers' selection criteria and professional development in an effort to ensure that they are all able to implement the highest-impact strategies.

Policy Implications

The more expansively systems think about teacher leadership, the more likely they are to bump up against policy barriers. Most obviously, it is extremely difficult to innovate in how teachers are allocated and paid given established salary schedules and categorical funding that fixes the number of teaching positions. Class-size restrictions make it difficult to use highly effective teachers and technology to teach students in larger groups. An administrator, not other teachers, is often required to be the evaluator of record for teachers. And until state licensure requirements for principals encompass the knowledge and skills necessary to foster teacher leadership, their training programs are unlikely to explicitly address them.

The first step in confronting policy barriers is to discern between those that are actually codified policies and those that just reflect past practices and a timidity to confront them. Overcoming the latter is mostly a matter of tenacity and courage. For policy barriers that are real, though, the challenge is more complicated. School district officials must start a conversation with the people who set the constraining policies and figure out how to partner with them to address the most serious impediments. Anticipating and proactively addressing policy issues on the horizon is similarly important. For example, as teacher leadership degree programs sprout up in universities, school systems, states, and the federal government need to discuss the purpose of these programs and the role they want to have relative to them, and identify the common knowledge and skills teacher leaders should possess.

Conclusion

High-performing organizations are dogged about nurturing talent and leveraging it to drive organizational improvement. The organizations that are particularly good at this carefully track both high-potential employees and high-performing ones. They think intentionally about the career progression of these employees and incentivize them to both grow their skills and apply them in response to organizational needs. Managers are assessed based on their ability to develop and retain talent, and employees know that if they perform well, they will have opportunities to advance their careers.

The American public education system does almost none of these things, at its peril. To meet the unprecedented demands facing public education, school systems must strategically pursue teacher leadership as a critical lever. This requires first establishing a vision for what teacher leadership can make possible in the system and how it can address identified needs. Having established clarity of purpose, the work then lies in establishing criteria for teacher leaders, defining the roles available (and how they relate to further differentiation

of teaching roles), creating time for teachers to lead (and be led by others), and designing a financial model that is viable long term. It also lies in creating the structures, systems, and culture needed at the school and system level to support teacher leadership, and building a strategy that both encourages innovation in teacher leadership and builds incremental systemic change needed to sustain teacher leadership in the long term. There is not a single, right approach. What matters is that systems get started and that they pursue the work intentionally and strategically, learning from their early work (and that of others), guided by an inspiring vision that reaches beyond current roles and responsibilities for teachers.

In this time of unprecedented expectations, public education needs a talent development and management strategy that enables it to recruit, develop, mobilize, and retain the best possible educators. The need is dire, but it is also exciting, because it increases the chances that in search of a solution, we will rethink roles and responsibilities in ways that transform schooling and educate students more effectively.

- 1 Several researchers have found that teacher experience correlates to student achievement only in the first few years of a career. See Steven G. Rivkin, Eric A. Hanushek, and John F. Kain, "Teachers, Schools, and Academic Achievement," *Econometrica* 73 no. 2, March 2005.
- 2 Linda Darling-Hammond, Ruth Chung Wei, and Aletha Andre, "How High-Achieving Countries Develop Great Teachers," Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education, August 2010.
- 3 Douglas Reeves, "High Performance in High Poverty Schools: 90-90-90 and Beyond," *Center for Performance Assessment* 20, 2003.
- 4 See Public Impact's "Opportunity Culture" work at <http://opportunityculture.org/reach> for more information on ways of organizing instruction and teacher leadership roles.
- 5 Andy Jacob, Elizabeth Vidyarthi, and Kathleen Carroll. "The Irreplaceables: Understanding the Real Retention Crisis in America's Urban Schools." *The New Teacher Project*, July 2012.
- 6 See <http://www.teacherleaderstandards.org> for more information on the teacher leadership standards and the process of their development.
- 7 See <http://erstrategies.org> for more information on Education Resource Strategies' work on building financially sustainable teacher career pathways.
- 8 See <http://www.leadingeducators.org> for more information on Leading Educators' work on building the leadership skills of teacher leaders.
- 9 See <http://www.teachplus.org> for more information on Teach Plus' work on building teacher leadership and engagement in educational policy.
- 10 In order to advance from one stage of the career ladder to the next, teachers must earn a certain number of effective or highly effective ratings. For example, teachers move from the second stage to the third after earning one highly effective rating or two consecutive effective ratings. Similarly, teachers move from the third stage to the fourth after earning two consecutive highly effective ratings.
- 11 In the private sector spans of control for managers tends to be 8-10 employees. In public education, principals are often responsible for the supervision and evaluation of anywhere from 20-40 teachers. See "Less is Sometimes Best" by Mark Rowh, at <http://www.hreonline.com/HRE/view/story.jhtml?id=150240243> for an explication of managerial spans of control.
- 12 Extended learning time can either support or exacerbate this problem. It can be a vehicle for rethinking teachers' days and schedules and instructional delivery to ensure 60 to 90 minutes of planning time daily, or it can simply increase the time teachers are expected to teach, making the job harder still.
- 13 Susan Moore Johnson, Jill Harrison Berg, and Morgaen L. Donaldson. *Who Stays in Teaching and Why?: A Review of the Literature on Teacher Retention*. Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2005.
- 14 See Public Impact's "Opportunity Culture" work at <http://opportunityculture.org/reach/pay-teachers-more/> for more information on these models.
- 15 "In grades 3 to 8, the percent of students in the first cohort of T3 schools earning advanced or proficient status on the MCAS has increased by 12.8 points in ELA and 16.5 percentage points in math over two years. The improvement of Cohort 2 schools in their first year is even more impressive, as they have made nearly as much growth in just one year. The percentage of students in the second cohort of T3 schools achieving advanced or proficient status increased by 11.3 points in ELA and 16.3 points in math." excerpted from, "Closing the Gap: Progress Over Two Years in T3 Schools," TeachPlus, 2013.
- 16 For a discussion of how improvement science can be applied to initiatives in education, see <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/improvement-research/approach>.



THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

EDUCATION & SOCIETY PROGRAM

www.aspeninstitute.org/education

EducationInfo@aspeninstitute.org

One Dupont Circle • Suite 700 • Washington, D.C. • 20036