



The Importance of Teacher Leaders in a District

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Academic leadership need not rest solely on the shoulders of district and building-level administrators, but can often be more effective when shared with classroom teachers. Unfortunately, some teachers may feel less willing to go the extra mile or create quality work when tasks appear as a directive with no teacher input. But, when teacher leaders are utilized to lead the work and provide examples of quality, their peers tend to buy-in. Many of our partner districts have chosen this route as they work through their curriculum, instruction, and assessment work.

What is the role of a teacher leader? Primarily, teacher leaders are expected to support and lead positive gains in student achievement. Some responsibilities may include mentoring or coaching other teachers, developing or leading professional development sessions, serving on leadership teams and committees, or collecting and monitoring data. Districts often hire teacher leaders in the role of instructional facilitator, to work with a specific range of grade levels or to be content specialists. They are often expected to serve as experts in a particular field or grade level and to

lead curriculum development efforts. One of their most important responsibilities is facilitating the lines of communication among all parties.

Why is there a need? There are numerous reasons. Teacher leadership programs emphasize the concept of shared leadership in a district. A facilitator may attend a conference as a district representative and, upon return, share the information with staff through local professional development. This approach is helpful for districts experiencing financial cutbacks or those trying to minimize lost student contact time with teachers. It can also relieve an additional initiative from the plate of the principals.

Teacher leaders are also beneficial when it comes to making decisions based on data. The need to increase student learning results has encouraged educators to collect and analyze data and respond to student needs accordingly. Classroom teachers can save valuable instruction and preparation time by relying on a teacher leader to pinpoint data trends and suggest instructional strategies for improvement.

Retaining quality teachers is critical to the success of any school district and the educational field as a whole. Even though college programs have extensive training for young educators, it is impossible to prepare them for every aspect of their actual teaching experience. Many districts now incorporate a mentoring program directed by the instructional coach, which provides support in instruction, resources, and classroom management.

Why does it work? A coaching relationship with another colleague can benefit the classroom teacher through modeling, team teaching, or mentoring in a non-evaluative way. This personalized support provides immediate feedback that allows for noticeable improvement as changes are made in previous practices. Research shows that using cooperative learning with peers at any level translates into significant gains.

Shared leadership provides a balanced foundation for any initiative. Whether it is curriculum development or implementing a new instructional strategy, the coach's job is to support practices and share responsibility for ensuring success. Some coaches are specialists in content, and others are experts of specific grade levels. Either way, this knowledge and experience allow coaches to help teachers prepare for student learning transitions and make sure content and skill development builds when curriculum is addressed.

Districts utilizing teacher leaders create a critical communication link in the school improvement process. When educational leaders have the necessary training and are used correctly, the qualitative and quantitative gains a district can make are immeasurable.