Resource 4. Teacher Leadership Models: Examples and Opportunities for Innovation

The most common teacher leadership models across the country typically have been those focused on direct instructional improvement (e.g., coaches and mentors) or those focused on gathering input for new policies or initiatives (e.g., teacher advisory boards). Some schools and districts have been exploring new and innovative ways to engage teacher leaders and leverage their talents to promote school improvement beyond direct instructional improvement. This resource provides an overview of three innovative approaches that schools, districts, and states can take to utilize teacher leaders: teacher-led schools, learning facilitators, and virtual instruction.

Teacher-Led Schools

A teacher-led school is one in which teachers are collectively responsible for traditional leadership and administrative responsibilities. Many teacher-led schools do not have administrators but instead share leadership and administrative responsibilities across a team of teacher leaders. The teacher-led school model may include a few teacher leader positions as part of a leadership team, or it may have diverse and varied teacher leadership roles as part of a differentiated leadership structure. By using a collaborative leadership approach, teacher-led schools can ensure that teacher insights, experiences, and knowledge are infused in decision making. Likewise, teacher-led schools can promote better ownership and buy-in for new initiatives, policies, and practices.

In teacher-led schools, specific teacher leaders may be responsible for making certain types of decisions or making recommendations regarding decisions for specific topic areas. For example, one teacher leader may be responsible for personnel decisions, including evaluation and teaching assignments, while another may be responsible for budget and compensation decisions. By differentiating leadership responsibilities, teacher leaders ensure that their administrative workload (in addition to their teaching responsibilities) is sustainable and balanced over time.

Schools interested in using a teacher-led model may establish agreements with the local school district and associations to employ these new staffing structures. States and districts may consider providing applications (with or without associated grant funding) to schools interested in adopting the teacher-led model, thus showing support and providing a clear process for the transition to a new leadership structure.

For more information, states and districts may explore the following resources:

- **Teachers Lead the Way in Denver**: This resource provides an overview of how the teacher-led Mathematics and Science Leadership Academy (part of Denver Public Schools) was developed and implemented, including key conditions for success and decision-making criteria. For more information, visit http://www.kappanonline.org/nazareno-teachers-lead-way-denver/.

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- **Teacher-Powered Schools Teacher Ambassadors**: This resource lists the current teacher ambassadors for the teacher-powered schools initiative, including information about the teacher-led schools in which they work. For more information, visit https://www.teacherpowered.org/about/ambassadors.

- **Teacher-Powered Schools School Inventory**: This resource provides a list of teacher-led schools (as well as many schools implementing differentiated leadership models) that are part of the teacher-powered schools initiative across the country. For more information, visit https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory.

- **Teacher-Powered Schools: Top Resources by Type**: This resource provides links to example contracts, decision-making tools, processes, memorandums of understanding, and other documents from teacher-led schools across the country. For more information, visit https://www.teacherpowered.org/resources/top.

Learning Facilitators

Many schools and districts are exploring approaches to personalizing learning, allowing more targeted and customized instruction in combination with more student-led learning activities. Some personalized learning approaches, such as those leveraging blended learning, rely on teacher leaders to act as learning facilitators, reducing or reframing direct instructional responsibilities to allow more time spent on planning and student support. This role is one approach to the lead teacher role outlined in Resource 2: Teacher Leader Role Profiles.

Teacher leaders in a learning facilitator role often manage a small team of teachers (typically two or three) serving a large group of students (generally 50 to 80 students). This class may also have students from multiple grades or learning cohorts. Students spend most of their learning time on individual learning activities, which may or may not include blended learning approaches. This structure enables the teacher leader to spend more time on planning and learning interventions, as well as more time on support and coaching for other teachers on the team. The teacher leader is responsible for working with other teachers on the team to manage curricula, learning resources, student assignments and activities, assessment, and interventions. Teachers and teacher leaders spend more time observing students, providing individualized instruction, analyzing student data, and curating instructional resources than providing whole-group instruction. For more information on this approach, see *Beyond Classroom Walls: Developing Innovative Work Roles for Teachers* at http://publicimpact.com/beyond-classroom-walls-developing-innovative-work-roles-for-teachers/ and *Innovative Staffing to Personalize Learning* at https://www.christenseninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/innovative-staffing_2018_final.pdf.

Virtual Instruction

Many schools, especially smaller schools in rural areas, often struggle to find highly effective staff for specific content areas (e.g., advanced science, technology, special education). Some schools are exploring virtual instruction opportunities in which in-person teachers or support staff work with a virtual teacher leader who is highly effective in their content area. This approach enables smaller schools to offer advanced coursework or additional learning pathways that they may not have been able to offer previously. Typically, the teacher leader serves as the

teacher of record because they have the credentials to offer credit for the course, while the support staff or in-person teacher ensures that there is adequate in-person supervision (including meeting teacher-to-student ratio requirements). The teacher leader typically leads direct instruction via a virtual platform, sets and grades assignments, and designs interventions based on student data. The teacher leader is also responsible for working with the in-person teachers and support staff to ensure they are prepared to support students in person, including facilitating student questions and coordinating assessment administration.

For more information, see:

- **Real Challenges, Virtual Solutions in Alaska Classrooms** at
  http://www.nea.org/archive/30580.htm

- **The Rise of the Virtual Teacher** at https://www.districtadministration.com/article/rise-virtual-teacher

- **Going Virtual: Unique Needs and Challenges of K–12 Online Teachers** at
  https://edtech.boisestate.edu/goingvirtual/goingvirtual2.pdf