

Strategies for Developing Effective Teacher Leadership

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What Counts as Teacher Leadership?

Objectives:

1. To make different understandings about teacher leadership visible.
2. To discuss how different understandings challenge teacher leadership.

Scenario:

Community School District has convened a task force to examine the possibility of growing teacher leadership in their mid-sized district. The task force participants are respected educators from within the district. At the first meeting, superintendent **June Walters** asks the participants to describe their interest in teacher leadership. The six members of the task force offer these views:

Carly (2nd grade teacher at Cedar Elementary)

I'd like to see more opportunities for teachers to get involved in decision-making. Our teachers really know the kids and they are committed to making the schools great. If teachers were more involved in setting the priorities and influencing the direction of our improvement efforts, I think we would be more successful. Just from casual conversations I know one teacher who would like to create a school-run community garden. I know another teacher who wants to offer computer training to parents. Teachers really have a lot to contribute if given the chance. I don't think we need specific teacher leader roles, just support for stepping up and taking ownership.

Andrew (7th grade teacher at Pinewood Middle School)

I agree that our teachers are an untapped resource but I'd like to see more of a formal effort to recognize teachers as leaders. Teachers are already pressed for time and if we want teachers to serve as leaders we need to give them the time to do so. If I had some release time during the day or a formal role as a mentor I could help the new teacher we hired mid-year. As it is, I don't have time to work with her. I would like to see a formal system of mentor or master teachers who offer support and assistance. These wouldn't necessarily have to be subject specific roles—they could focus on more generic pedagogical support or tips for classroom management.

Megan (4th grade teacher at Beech Tree Elementary)

I guess my views differ a little. I feel like we have some great programs and resources already available to teachers but so often teachers don't make use of them. If we create formal teacher leader roles, we need to make sure they get utilized. I don't think teachers should have the option

of deciding whether or not to work with the teacher leader. That's like saying teachers don't have to be learners. Instead, the teacher leader would be responsible for actively building a culture of collaborative teacher learning in our schools, where teachers learn every day, not just on staff development days.

Cora (Sycamore Middle School Principal)

It's true that our expectations for students and teachers have increased and not all of our teachers believe these changes are here to stay. I think all the teachers in my building would benefit from working with a teacher leader who has dedicated time in her schedule to be a resource. And frankly, I don't know all the subject areas equally well. I would love to have an experienced teacher working beside me and helping me give teachers feedback about how they can improve their instruction. A teacher leader could work with individual teachers in depth in ways that I just don't have the capacity to do.

Daniel (CSD Curriculum and Instruction Supervisor)

My view of teacher leadership focuses on the aims we have as a district. We need to be more serious about increasing coherence across and within schools. When students change classrooms or schools there should be some level of familiarity—the schools shouldn't be doing completely different things. I see the teacher leader as someone who has formal responsibility for aiding vertical coordination, from district to classroom, as well as horizontal coordination, across teachers in a given school and maybe even across schools. To date, we haven't done a great job with this and I think it's because folks at the school level haven't been involved in this broader work.

Ashley (Reading Specialist at Willow Elementary)

I guess I'm the odd one out here. I see teachers acting as leaders every day. They take responsibility for their students, coordinate with their colleagues, seek new learning opportunities, and volunteer when needed. I'm just not sure we need another initiative. We already have teacher leaders.

Conclusion:

When the meeting concludes, **June Walters** reviews her notes. She had hoped to have a better understanding about how to move forward with teacher leadership. Instead, there seems to be little agreement about what teacher leadership in *Community School District* should look like. *"Each of these views seems valid but everyone seems to want something different,"* June thinks to herself. *"I think first I need to build recognition that teacher leadership means different things to different people. Then maybe we can decide what we want it to mean in Community School District."*

What Counts as Teacher Leadership?

Questions for small group discussion:

1. Which of the views expressed by the task force members is most similar to your understanding of teacher leadership? How so?
2. Are there understandings presented by the task force that you disagree with? Why?
3. Which understandings do you see at work in your school, district, or organization?
4. How do different understandings challenge teacher leadership?