A Systemic Approach to Elevating Teacher Leadership

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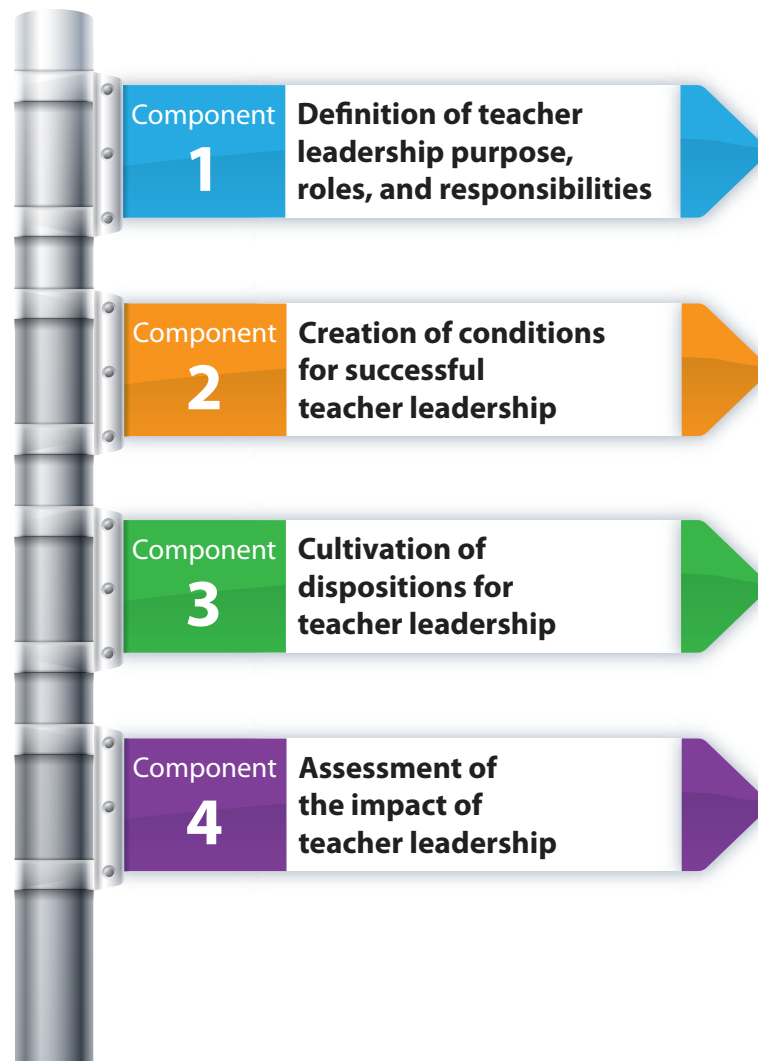Designer: Jane Thurmond
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A Systemic Approach to Elevating Teacher Leadership

Components make up a system of teacher leadership.

Component 1	**Definition of teacher leadership purpose, roles, and responsibilities**
Component 2	**Creation of conditions for successful teacher leadership**
Component 3	**Cultivation of dispositions for teacher leadership**
Component 4	**Assessment of the impact of teacher leadership**

A system of teacher leadership begins with defined assumptions.

Assumption 1.	Assumption 2.	Assumption 3.	Assumption 4.	Assumption 5.
Teacher leadership impacts student and peer performance.	Teachers lead, formally or informally, wherever they are.	All teachers have opportunities for leadership.	Teacher leadership requires that teachers develop capacity for effective leadership.	Teachers develop leadership capacity when they are supported.

Assumption 6.	Assumption 7.	Assumption 8.	Assumption 9.	Assumption 10.
Teacher leadership requires changes in other leaders throughout the school system.	Teacher leaders take responsibility for their own professional growth and the growth of others.	Teacher leadership requires courage, tolerance for ambiguity, and flexibility.	Teacher leaders foster collaborative cultures that promote continuous improvement.	Teacher leaders collect evidence of impact resulting from their work.

Teacher leadership is often defined as a *set of practices that enhance the teaching profession.*

As broad as it is, however, that definition is too limiting. Teacher leadership, as a means to improving schools, "is a powerful strategy to promote effective, collaborative teaching practices in schools that lead to increased student achievement, improved decision making at the school and district level, and create a dynamic teaching profession for the 21st century" (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Commission, 2008, p. 3). When they lead, according to Julian Weissglass (1998), teachers take responsibility for what matters most to them. Teacher leaders, as do leaders within and outside education, share a heightened responsibility for equitable opportunities for the success of their school, students, peers, and communities.

States and districts are leveraging teacher leadership in multiple ways to professionalize teaching, create opportunities for teacher career advancement, facilitate school improvement, and facilitate professional learning for educator and student success. Research and evidence-based practice increasingly point to teacher leadership as a viable strategy for addressing the complex nature of schools, while engaging teachers more fully in applying their expertise to strengthen the profession and increase student success (Aspen Institute, 2014; Crowther, 2009; Danielson, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2016; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009).

For more than a decade the focus on teacher leadership has expanded. Researchers have examined various ways in which teachers assume leadership and identified benefits of teacher leadership. The *Model Teacher Leadership Standards* are codifying the practice of teacher leaders. Policymakers in states such as Michigan, Illinois, Georgia, and New York have established or revised licensure requirements for teacher leaders. School system leaders have established positions for teacher leaders and created funding schemes to support teacher leadership roles. Among these wide-ranging efforts are numerous rationales for promoting teacher leadership, yet there remains insufficient practical guidance for developing systemic approaches that advance and sustain viable teacher leadership.

This report offers a streamlined, practical resource for initiating or reviewing and revising the approach to teacher leadership within schools or school systems. From an array of issues related to effective teacher leadership, it focuses on the most essential. The discussion begins by acknowledging that teacher leadership is contextually defined and operationalized in ways that are appropriate to the unique characteristics of each school or district. By proposing a set of questions to consider rather than the answers to those questions, this essay places the essential work of initiating, reviewing, or refining teacher leadership in the hands of those who are responsible for its success and impact. Finally, this paper emphasizes the urgency for, and shows a method toward, a systemic approach to achieve the goals and maximize the effects of this high-leverage effort.

Teacher leadership is about more than representation

Teachers have long served as committee members, team leaders, department chairs, association leaders, and curriculum writers. In these roles teachers have most often served as *representatives* or coordinators to carry out others' expectations rather than *leaders who enact change* (Livingston, 1992). In addition, leadership roles for teachers have traditionally been narrowly defined or lacked flexibility, and many require that teachers who choose leadership must decide to leave teaching for administration. Advancing their careers while remaining in the role of teacher is what many teacher leaders want and their students and the profession deserve.

Advocacy for teacher professionalism and expanded leadership opportunities and roles is based on the understanding that teachers, because they have daily contact with students, are in the best position to make critical decisions about issues related to teaching and learning. Moreover, they are better able to implement changes in a comprehensive and continuous manner (Howey, 1988; Livingston, 1992). Expanding teacher roles also serves an ongoing need to attract and retain qualified teachers for career-long, rather than temporary, service (Boyd-Dimock & McGree, 1995).

A system of teacher leadership begins with defined assumptions

A strong rationale for investing in and cultivating teacher leadership is the foundation of a comprehensive system. It provides the basis for either developing a new system or assessing the current system and making revisions. As educators begin to strengthen teacher leadership, they recognize first that a system of teacher leadership is more than another program to be implemented and eventually replaced. It is a transformation of the way educators work within schools every day to strengthen culture and professional practices and enhance professional learning opportunities leading to student success.

Secondly, educators know that establishing or enhancing a system of teacher leadership begins with clarifying the set of assumptions that drive teacher leader practices. Without clearly defined fundamental assumptions, educators' efforts may not lead toward the desired results. The following clarifying set of assumptions, drawn from the practices of the authors, serve as the starting point for the recommended actions proposed in this document:

1. Teacher leadership impacts student and peer performance.	2. Teachers lead, formally or informally, wherever they are.
Multiple factors lead to the success of teacher leadership, the most important of which is the success of students and peers. With student and peer success as their main priorities, teacher leaders' efforts will produce stronger results. Teacher leaders influence student and peer success directly and indirectly as follows: promoting and facilitating professional learning and collaboration; designing, implementing, and supporting school and district change efforts to improve peer and student success; contributing to research and policy; serving as spokespersons for the profession, their schools, and districts; and mentoring and coaching peers. As a result, measures of the impact of teacher leadership on student and peer success are a basis for any evaluation of teacher leadership and teacher leaders.	Whether in their classrooms with students or on special assignment outside of them, teachers lead wherever they are. For teachers, leadership is more about influence than power and authority. They assume responsibility, not only because they are selected or volunteer to do so, but also because they are driven by professional and personal moral purposes to contribute to the success of students, peers, school, and community. They may assume formal leadership roles established by schools and school systems (e.g. coach, mentor, curriculum developer, or parent liaison). More often, teacher leaders act without formal designation as leaders. Roles and responsibilities of teacher leaders vary dramatically within and across districts and schools; the most important form of leadership occurs when teachers recognize a need and step in to help address it.

3. **All teachers have opportunities for leadership.**	4. **Teacher leadership requires that teachers develop capacity for effective leadership.**	5. **Teachers develop leadership capacity when they are supported.**	6. **Teacher leadership requires changes in other leaders throughout the school system.**
All teachers can become leaders. Joining a profession means collaborating with peers to influence the profession, contributing to the body of knowledge that shapes the profession, and contributing to the development of novice members of the profession and school community. Within schools and school systems, all individuals have responsibility for contributing to the success of the organization. More teachers may engage in leadership when they know how best to leverage their influence and experience. They gain this understanding when school district and teacher leaders provide leadership roles and guide teachers in assuming those roles. When system leaders thoughtfully define, formalize, and support leadership roles within a school or school system, they provide teachers with opportunities to extend and expand their leadership capacity. As an added benefit, they give school systems a pipeline for teachers who seek leadership opportunities or administrative roles.	Leadership is enhanced when teachers apply knowledge, skills, dispositions, and behaviors associated with effective leaders. Knowledge about the design, implementation, and evaluation of professional learning is a key variable in developing that capacity. Teacher leaders effectively use interpersonal skills to build trusting relationships within the organization, engage peers and administrators in collaborative learning, and ensure that student learning is the cornerstone for all decisions about teaching and learning. Teacher leaders display attitudes and behaviors that positively affect the environments in which they work, particularly the belief that all students and teachers have the capacity for growth and goal attainment.	A key factor in developing the capacity of teachers to be leaders is the nature and frequency of support available to them. School and district administrators (e.g. district staff, curriculum coordinators, program directors, and experienced teacher leaders) play a significant role in developing capacity of teacher leaders; they are often the first line of support for teacher leaders. Some leaders may serve as mentors to novice and coaches to experienced teacher leaders. Structures that provide periodic networking opportunities such as professional learning, communities of practice, mentoring, coaching, and supervision are also valuable in developing and sustaining leadership capacity. Routine feedback from a knowledgeable colleague and opportunities for shared leadership experiences are additional methods of supporting novice and experienced teacher leaders.	For the full potential of teacher leadership to be realized, other leaders within a school or school system must shift their own beliefs, roles, and responsibilities. The primary shift is adopting a belief in the potential of shared or distributed leadership. This means that administrators must value the expertise of teacher leaders and acknowledge that they contribute to substantive and complex challenges. Secondly, for teacher leader influence to thrive, building and district administrators must support teachers leaders in cultivating their strengths; engaging them in significant and authentic leadership responsibilities; and providing honest, learning-focused feedback. Lastly, school and school system administrators create conditions for teacher leaders to thrive; co-create opportunities to lead; and provide support, performance management, professional learning, time, and other resources.

7. Teacher leaders take responsibility for their own professional growth and the growth of others.	8. Teacher leadership requires courage, tolerance for ambiguity, and flexibility.	9. Teacher leaders foster collaborative cultures that promote continuous improvement.	10. Teacher leaders collect evidence of impact resulting from their work.
For teacher leaders, continuous professional growth is critical to increasing student performance and a responsibility of all teaching professionals. Teacher leaders recognize, value, and promote professional growth as an essential element in meeting individual, school, and system goals. They ensure that growth experiences are embedded in their daily work, aligned with student growth goals, and supportive of the vision of the organization. They promote professional learning as a collective responsibility with shared accountability for peer success and student achievement. Operating from a growth mindset, teacher leaders believe that their peers are capable of continuous and significant growth in their instructional practices. Teacher leaders are facilitators of professional growth and have as much vested in the growth of their colleagues as they do in their own growth.	Teacher leaders can be a starting point on the journey for building leadership capacity. Teacher leaders must have courage to make their practice transparent for others to critique, to lead their peers, and to cross back and forth between the boundaries of the teaching arena and the leading arena. Sometimes the boundaries are blurred, and the roles less clearly defined. For that reason, teacher leaders are called on to embrace ambiguity and to be flexible as their work unfolds and as they and their peers grow comfortable with their new responsibilities and identity as a leader.	Teacher leaders are instrumental in developing and sustaining a work culture that encourages and promotes continuous improvement. According to Michael Fullan (2001; 2007) and Terrence Deal and Kent Peterson (2010), culture includes the guiding beliefs and values that drive the operations of a school. Although teacher leaders believe strongly in continuous improvement as a hallmark of a profession, they recognize that a teacher's willingness to pursue continuous improvement is fostered by the culture in which he or she works. Teacher leaders know that effective practice requires nurturing and support. They catalyze a sense of urgency and efficacy among adults and engender peer-to-peer accountability and collective responsibility for the success of every teacher and student. They realize that professional engagement within and outside the school community is paramount to attainment of school goals. They use interpersonal skills to build trusting relationships and foster a sense of belonging among the members of the school community.	Because they are committed to and model continuous improvement, teacher leaders seek evidence about the impact of their work. They model how to collect and use data to refine their work. They collect a variety of formative data informally and formally from peers about the effects of their collaboration. They use a variety of evidence including student data, data from peers, and data from supervisors. They also encourage and facilitate the collection and use of evidence about the conditions within schools and school systems to assist with improving the environment, trust, relationships, and attitudes within their workplaces to support peer success and student learning.

Components make up a system of teacher leadership

A systemic approach to teacher leadership has four core components: a definition of teacher leadership, conditions conducive to teacher leadership, dispositions for teacher leadership, and assessment of the impact of teacher leadership.

Elevating an existing teacher leadership effort into a systemic approach to improve teaching and learning requires a point of entry, and that point will vary in different contexts. School and school system leaders, including teacher leaders, might first assess the current teacher leadership practices using the components as criteria and then begin where they have opportunity for improving. They may start with any component given that the components are interdependent and not necessarily linear or sequential. In fact, because of the interdependent nature of the components, multiple actions may occur simultaneously. When a school or school system is initiating a new effort to activate teacher leadership, however, the recommended actions may be more helpful when followed in sequence. Although each action contributes to the development of a comprehensive system for teacher leadership, the system is exponentially more effective in achieving desired outcomes when all actions are based on collective decision making by fully represented stakeholders.

The discussion of each essential component within the proposed system of teacher leadership includes the following: (1) the most essential actions needed to assess, refine, or construct the component; (2) a brief rationale for the component; (3) a scenario that illustrates the component; and (4) questions to guide planning and refinement of the component. The proposed questions prompt educators to examine their current approach to teacher leadership, how effective teacher leadership is within each school or system, and how teacher leadership contributes to the overall success of students, educators, schools, and school systems. For those who strive to enhance or initiate teacher leadership, the recommended actions may occur at different rates depending on the circumstances within the school system.

Definition of teacher leadership purpose, roles, and responsibilities

Efforts to initiate or refine teacher leadership begin with clarity of goals and purpose for teacher leadership. To clarify goals and purpose, it is often necessary to define what the concept of teacher leadership is and to describe how it looks in action.

Actions

- Review and clarify the foundational assumptions that undergird teacher leadership;
- Determine the purpose and desired outcomes for advancing teacher leadership in schools and school systems;
- Define teacher leadership;
- Determine desired outcomes for teacher leadership in schools and districts;
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of teacher leaders;
- Establish expectations for teacher leaders and those who support and supervise them;
- Align teacher leaders' work with improving educator and student success.

Rationale

Teacher leadership is not a new idea, yet recently it is resurging as a viable approach to improving schools, teacher career trajectories, and student learning. The renewed efforts to engage teachers as leaders requires that teachers and administrators think differently about both the role of teachers as leaders within the school system and their contributions to increasing school, educator, and student success. The key is that teacher leadership is not another fix, but rather a shift in how teachers, the largest number of employees in any school system, actively contribute to achieving the identified goals of a school, school system, and professional colleagues. Teacher leaders' positive influence results in improved educator practice including their own, systemwide policies and practices that support effective instruction and student learning, and collective responsibility and shared accountability for student success.

Teacher leadership requires a clear statement of purpose and clearly defined outcomes and designated roles aligned with the outcomes to be more than just another panacea for fixing schools. The Aspen Institute (2014) describes this need as follows:

> Effective teacher leadership marries form with function in order to create transformative change in schools. By function, we mean that the teacher leadership initiatives are not created for their own sake but are designed to advance other pressing priorities. By form, we mean that the teacher leader roles are clearly defined, with sufficient time, support, and resources to be effective. (p. 3)

Defining teacher leadership and the desired outcomes is a recommended starting point for specifying roles and responsibilities for teacher leaders primarily because the roles and responsibilities follow the designated purpose and goals. The roles and responsibilities may be formal or informal; in other words, teachers have the capacity to lead from within and outside the classroom. Formal roles for teacher leaders are defined when a portion of a teacher's workday is designated to specific roles outside classroom responsibilities (e.g. coach, mentor, learning facilitator, or data analyst) and for which there are defined performance expectations, support, and supervision. These may include roles for which there is additional compensation for expanded responsibilities, work day or year, expectations, and preparation. Informal roles, primarily voluntary and often self-initiated by teacher leaders, include community advocate, peer support, representative on committees, engagement in professional associations or other professional groups, or other volunteer positions.

Deliberate attention to planning for successful teacher leadership requires collaboration among stakeholders, including, at a minimum, teachers, principals, central office staff, and teacher association representatives, to specify the purpose and outcomes of teacher leadership within the education system; define teacher leadership; determine the roles and responsibilities for teacher leaders; and establish the policies and conditions for success. With thoughtful deliberation through intentional and dedicated planning and sufficient stakeholder engagement, teacher leaders will not only contribute productively to the success of students, colleagues, schools, and school systems, but also grow as professionals.

Scenario

During the past 10 years, a low-performing district engaged in a variety of strategies to increase student achievement and teacher turnover. Push-back and lack of buy-in across the board thwarted most of the district's attempts to address the evident challenges. The district's new superintendent, eager to confront the issues, invited representative stakeholders including teachers, principals, parents, students, teacher and principal association officials, and community members to come together to explore different ways to increase student achievement and teacher retention. The representatives agreed. They reviewed research supporting the conclusion that increased collaboration among teachers gives them increased opportunity to share leadership and accountability for student success and is a lever for implementing new standards and building a culture of professionalism and collaboration.

The representative group recognized that revitalizing the district's teacher leadership program was an opportune strategy to consider. They reexamined the function and purpose of teacher leadership and the roles and responsibilities of the teacher leaders with the intent of expanding opportunities for teacher engagement, collaboration, leadership, and voice to increase teaching quality and student success. They became the de facto districtwide steering committee charged with redesigning, implementing, monitoring, and assessing teacher leadership throughout the district. Their purpose was to distribute leadership more broadly among teachers to capitalize on their expertise; identify needs that exist in the district and in the schools which teachers were best suited to tackle; identify expanded methods for elevating the voices of teachers; and design formal and informal ways to achieve full benefit for teachers and students from teacher leadership.

As the steering committee designed and implemented a renewed effort to engage teachers as leaders, the steering committee specified clear outcomes of improved student achievement, increased opportunities for teacher growth, and improved instructional practices as measured by indicators of teacher retention and student success. In their new roles, teacher leaders served as classroom supporters by modeling high-impact instructional practices, co-teaching with peers, and coaching teachers on instructional practices.

Questions to consider

1. What are the assumptions we agree to about teacher leadership?

2. How do we define teacher leadership?

3. What are the purposes and desired outcomes for teacher leadership in our school or school system?

4. What is the form and function of our teacher leadership program?

5. Who are the most appropriate representatives to engage in developing or strengthening the existing teacher leadership efforts within the district?

6. What roles, formal and informal, do teacher leaders assume to contribute to the school and district goals?

7. What are the expectations of the teacher leaders? What is the scope of responsibility and expected impact of teacher leaders on students, colleagues, schools, and the school system?

8. How do we communicate the purpose, goals, and roles of teacher leaders to teachers and administrators in each school and in the district?

Creating supporting conditions for teacher leadership increases the potential for success. The following discussion focuses on two supporting conditions: healthy culture and supportive structures.

Healthy culture

Healthy school and school system cultures are essential to the lifeblood of teacher leadership (Crowther, 2009; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Valdez, Broin, & Carroll, 2015; Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2008). A healthy culture supports and advances teacher leadership, and teacher leadership contributes positively to a healthy culture.

Actions

- Assess existing school system and school culture to identify supports for and barriers to teacher leadership;
- Address barriers to successful teacher leadership;
- Reinforce and strengthen supporting factors for teacher leadership;
- Redefine relationship among central office staff, building administrators, teacher, and teacher leaders.

Rationale

Culture refers to the values, beliefs, norms, and practices that are evident within the school and school system. Members and their relationships, history, and experiences shape the culture of an organization. Traditionally, teachers are considered to be at the bottom of the hierarchical levels among professional employees and beneath central office and school administrators. Because of their position in the education hierarchy, teachers often have an uphill climb to be recognized as valued contributing members of the education workforce. Yet, their voice and engagement benefit the school system when leaders strengthen opportunities for teacher leadership. The factors identified below contribute to a healthy culture:

Relational Trust. Researchers (Bryk & Schneider, 2002) found that relational trust among all members of a school community is even more critical than logistical or structural conditions for meaningful school improvement and is highly correlated with increased student achievement. All members of the school community depend on others to achieve desired outcomes. This dependency tends to create a level of vulnerability, which can be overcome over time as individuals interact and gain confidence that others will treat them in predictable ways. In their research, Megan Tschannen-Moran (2014) and Anthony Bryk and Barbara Schneider (2002) found that trust exists among individuals who can predict that others will (a) always have their best interest at heart; (b) speak the truth; (c) "make themselves vulnerable to others by sharing information, influence, and control" (Tschannen-Moran, p. 24); (d) consistently follow through on their promises and obligations; and (e) be honest about their skill levels.

Collective responsibility. Teacher leadership thrives most effectively in schools where teachers and administrators share a sense of collective responsibility for the learning of every student. In such schools, staff continuously learn together and apply what they learn to their work. When all staff members assume collective responsibility, each teacher's practice influences the practice of others, and students benefit from the best thinking of every teacher (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000).

Commitment to continuous development. In a culture that supports teacher leadership, all teachers consistently and continuously learn to expand their professional practice and integrate new ones to meet student needs and ensure their success. Expectations and support for continuous improvement of professional practice results from formal and informal professional learning, reflection, feedback, and collaboration. Teacher leaders model and may facilitate professional learning, feedback, and reflection among their peers.

Recognition and celebrations. How expertise is recognized and achievements celebrated influence the culture of an organization. In healthy cultures, all members respect, acknowledge, and celebrate one another's expertise and contributions to the organization, the profession, and the achievement of shared goals. Daniel Pink (2011) identifies mastery as one of the primary human drivers, yet in schools mastery among adults has been less recognized as an important factor in what keeps people engaged. In many cases, because of the strong egalitarian culture within schools, mastery is perceived as a detriment rather than a benefit. Successful implementation of a systems approach to teacher leadership

means that all teachers and administrators trust in the credibility and expertise of teacher leaders. They also view these leaders as partners with every other staff member in the collective effort to achieve shared goals. Changing this perception is crucial to changing the culture in schools and school systems. School and school system leaders, including teacher leaders, establish formal and informal recognitions for member contributions to improving student success; achieving individual, team, peer, school system, and school goals; refining and extending professional practices; and advancing the teaching profession.

Autonomy. Another significant motivator, according to Pink (2011), is autonomy. Autonomy is the prerogative to have control over one's work. When autonomy exists within a school or school system, administrators treat teachers as professionals by trusting their professional judgment and giving them freedom to independently and creatively identify, generate, and implement solutions to problems and complete tasks. This shift in administrators' beliefs and practice determines the degree of authentic autonomy teachers have. In addition, genuine autonomy means that "barriers are removed, and resources are found to support teachers' efforts" (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009, p. 85) to act independently and creatively while sharing the goals of the school or school system.

Structures to support teacher leadership

In addition to establishing a healthy culture, supportive structures must be in place that facilitate teacher leadership. Such structures include operational conditions such as procedures, resources including time, and policies that align with the school system's purpose, definition of, and goals for teacher leadership.

Actions

- Develop a comprehensive plan to implement or refine teacher leadership;
- Assess current structures, procedures, and policies to identify those that support and impede teacher leadership;
- Create district and school supporting conditions, particularly policies and procedures, through which teacher leaders thrive;
- Establish transparent processes for selecting, preparing, supporting, recognizing, and supervising teacher leaders;
- Create formal and informal opportunities for teachers to engage in leadership practices;
- Prepare other leaders within the system to support teacher leaders.

Rationale

Structures include the substantive factors that allow teachers to serve as leaders. They include procedures, policies, time, preparation, resources, roles, responsibilities, management, supervision, and levels of decision making. "Structures within schools are established to provide teachers with input into school policies, curriculum, and professional development" (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2008, p. 27). Successful systemic teacher leadership is embedded into the culture of a school and school system, yet it thrives when the structures are in place that allow teachers to succeed as leaders. The factors described below are key supportive structures.

Comprehensive plan for teacher leadership. For teacher leadership to achieve its maximum potential, districts establish a comprehensive plan to guide its implementation and continuous improvement. Stakeholders who represent all those who will be affected contribute to the development of a thoughtful, deliberate plan. It requires engagement from a large group of stakeholders who have authentic decision-making responsibility to shape the program and its parameters, conditions, implementation, and ongoing assessment. Some aspects of teacher leadership may be controversial, so broader engagement, which brings more voices to the table, allows deeper issues to surface and be considered. Stakeholder engagement maintains transparency, reflects and integrates diverse perspectives, advances ownership for success, and generates better decisions.

As with any new or revised initiatives, rollout influences success. Likewise, education planners or leaders need to give sufficient attention to the resources needed to sustain success. For teacher leadership the resources include time for collaboration, potential new staff, supervisory support, fiscal resources, technology, and materials. Often school district leaders value teacher leadership as important, yet fail to provide the resource investments to make it successful.

Role changes. A major consideration, often missing in the formalization of teacher leadership, is the need to change roles of other leaders in the system. Principals and central office staff have substantive responsibilities for the success of teacher leadership. Their roles will change, as will those of the teacher leaders. Changes align with the goals, purpose, and roles intended for teacher leaders; consequently, any changes extend well beyond support of new teacher leaders. Administrators also need to shift their practices, influence, power, responsibility, and authority to share authentic leadership for effective teaching and student learning. Making this shift means sharing power rather than inviting representation. It means that all teachers and administrators engage authentically with and trust the credibility of teacher leaders. Authentic teacher leadership also requires that all teachers recognize and respect the role of teacher leader as a differentiated role among teachers rather than one of administrators.

Being deliberate about involving all stakeholders in the development or redesign of teacher leadership means replacing the "way we work" in schools and school systems with one that actively engages teachers as leaders in partnership with administrators. These changes reach far beyond operational decisions, such as how teacher leaders are selected and supported, into culture embedded within schools about power and authority. For teacher leadership to be successful, all stakeholders must be willing to make significant cultural shifts specifically related to seniority, authority, autonomy, and egalitarianism (Danielson, 2007).

Preparation, support, and supervision. Teacher leaders benefit from sufficient leadership preparation and support as well as ongoing supervision that stresses professional growth. Options for preparation and support may include graduate work in teacher leadership or administration, specialized workshops in teacher leadership, mentoring and coaching in leadership work, or other forms of professional learning. Rather than cover only general principles of leadership, the most effective content is tailored to the identified roles and responsibilities that teacher leaders will assume. Furthermore, during preparation the processes and supports offered model the salient behaviors expected of teacher leaders along with district and school commitment to continuous development for all staff. Fair and equitable coaching and supervision include a clear set of performance standards for teacher leaders; regular opportunities for reflection, feedback, and goal setting; and intermittent expert judgment of performance based on established, transparent criteria.

Opportunities to lead. Thoughtful educators plan opportunities for teacher leadership and they fully expect those options to evolve into more sophisticated examples of leadership as the system develops and succeeds. As a result of planning teachers are more likely to experience a range of relevant, authentic, and meaningful opportunities for leadership. Furthermore, the expectations for their responsibilities are clearly and explicitly articulated to increase their effectiveness. School and district administrators and teachers work collaboratively to identify opportunities for formal and informal teacher leadership, ways to facilitate teacher engagement in leadership roles, and processes for supporting teachers to become leaders. Whether the district creates formal positions or chooses voluntary opportunities for teachers to lead, it is important that district leaders advocate the opportunities and regularly provide updates about teacher leaders as examples of their work and impact. Teachers and administrators assume responsibility to serve as ambassadors for expanding teachers' knowledge about and participation in leadership practices.

District policies and procedures. Districts demonstrate and bolster respect for the teacher leadership position through policies, procedures, and practices such as (a) creating clear and transparent selection criteria; (b) including provisions for the role through association contracts or agreements as appropriate; (c) incorporating leadership as a criterion in the teacher performance system; (d) establishing policies and procedures for pathways for career advancement including added compensation and expanded responsibilities; (e) providing time and resources to execute teacher leader duties; and (f) recognizing teacher leaders for their contributions to the school and school system. Teacher leadership may require the removal of policies that serve as barriers to its success, particularly those related to role responsibilities, supervisory processes, and confidentiality among teachers.

One factor that fosters teacher leadership is a champion. The champion is someone with a formal designation as the coordinator or facilitator of teacher leadership such as a central office staff person or a principal or assistant principal in a school. A champion may be someone who informally serves as the advocate for teacher leadership to coordinate efforts to advance teacher leadership. Champions may simultaneously coordinate teacher leaders, provide support, facilitate problem solving, and coach or mentor teacher leaders. Additionally, a champion may manage the selection, preparation, support, and supervision of teacher leaders; review research; facilitate continuous improvement of teacher leaders and the teacher leadership system; serve as a point person for information and support regarding teacher leadership; ensure teacher leaders have the necessary resources to succeed; and potentially supervise their work. The designation of a formal champion signals the district's commitment to the success of teacher leadership.

Scenario

The district Teacher Leadership Steering Committee received a charge to examine current district conditions that both support and hinder teacher leadership and generate a plan to address those that most significantly interfere with the district's goal to expand teacher leadership opportunities. Members conducted a series of focus groups, gathered survey data, and reviewed documents to analyze common practices, school board guidelines, and contractual language related to teacher leadership.

Teachers reported that they want to be respected, to be supported publicly, and to feel safe in identifying problems that interfere with their best practice. They want to take part in shaping the solutions by talking openly with each other as respected professionals. They want to minimize the perceived hierarchy of influence among teachers based on longevity within the school. They want real opportunities to voice their ideas and know that their ideas are integrated into decision making. They want to see visible results for their work and celebrate successes, both big and little. Chief among the barriers they identified was lack of a high level of trust among teachers solidly based on the expertise of the teachers who stepped into leadership roles. Their goal was to create a culture in which peers valued continuous development, collegial support, and collaboration to increase instructional practice and student learning.

Principals and central office administrators acknowledged that they were less likely to trust teachers' professional judgments and promised to examine and reshape the beliefs that held them back. They recognized the value of sharing leadership with teachers. Rather than simply giving teachers more work to do, school and district leaders agreed to find viable ways for teachers to take authentic leadership.

Given their roles as administrators, they knew that autonomy would be a challenging issue for them, but again, they committed to work with teachers to create parameters that provided autonomy. Teachers and administrators identified structural challenges such as time, role clarification for teacher leaders and administrators, selection, preparation, and support of teacher leaders that needed revising as well as some policies and practices that needed revamping to advance teacher leadership. They asked the superintendent to name the professional learning director as the point person for teacher leadership within the district. After requesting that they continue as an advisory and oversight team, the teachers and administrators set a consensus goal to leverage teacher expertise and engage teachers as leaders in achieving district and school goals for student success. Then they got to work identifying specific actions needed to redesign and expand the existing teacher leadership efforts to meet the goal.

During the next school year as their plan was reviewed, accepted, and put into motion, the steering committee met regularly to address emerging issues. The steering committee was able to change the roles of building and district administrators to support teacher leadership; expand the scope of central office staff contributors to teacher leader success; and refine teacher association supports for teacher leaders. The steering committee used data collected from multiple sources to assess progress and impact of the districtwide efforts to improve the culture and remove impeding structures. Committee members used the data to keep a keen eye on the purposes and expected outcomes of the teacher leadership system as they adjusted their plan.

Questions to consider

1. How do current school system and school structures (e.g. selection, preparation, support, supervision, policies, procedures, and conditions) and culture (e.g. communication, decision making authority, roles, power and influence, processes, celebrations, etc.) contribute to and interfere with the success of teacher leadership? What needs to change to increase the viability of teacher leadership?
2. How will the new role expectations for teacher leaders be introduced to the faculty?
3. What are the best ways to engage teachers in generating strategies and tactics for addressing challenges within the school or school system?
4. How will the roles of current leaders (i.e. building administrators, union leaders, and central office staff) change to provide authentic leadership opportunities to teacher leaders?
5. In what areas do teacher leaders have autonomy? How is their autonomy supported with resources?
6. How do teacher leaders with different titles interact with one another?
7. What will be included in the professional learning program for teacher leaders?
8. What are the standards that guide the implementation and evaluation of the teacher leader initiative?

Teacher dispositions influence the success of teacher leadership efforts. Not all teachers view themselves as leaders. Some assume that only certain teachers can be leaders, or believe they must be chosen to be a leader, often by someone in authority. These deeply held beliefs emerge from teachers' own perceptions about their identity as a teacher and from the hierarchical structures that exist in most education systems. Building teacher agency and challenging assumptions that serve as barriers to teacher leadership are fundamental to refining and expanding teacher leadership.

Actions

- Identify and challenge assumptions that interfere with achieving the goals and purpose of teacher leadership within the district;
- Recognize examples of dispositions of a teacher leader in action and teachers who model the dispositions of a teacher leader;
- Provide opportunities to develop teacher leader dispositions;
- Provide teacher leaders with tools to self-assess their dispositions.

Rationale

"The litmus test of all leadership is whether it mobilizes people's commitment to putting their energy into actions designed to improve things. It is individual commitment, but above all it is collective mobilization" (Fullan, 2001, p. 9).

To mobilize action in oneself and others, leaders must hold a set of dispositions that are common among leaders regardless of their position or role. Paul Ash and John D'Auria (2013), Charlotte Danielson (2006), Joellen Killion and Cindy Harrison (2006), and the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium (2008) identify the dispositions that form the bedrock "of those teachers who emerge to lead their colleagues in important initiatives" (Danielson, p. 36). Common to the identity of teacher leaders are the attributes described below:

Deep commitment to student learning. They accept increasing student success as the core mission and moral purpose of their work. Teacher leaders maintain an unwavering focus on improving student learning by diligently supporting peers to increase the effectiveness of their professional practices. Teacher leaders believe that every adult contributes productively to student learning. They respect fully and recognize each colleague, whether he or she directly or indirectly supports student success. They value an equity-based approach to support and resources that ensures all staff and students achieve their greatest potential. Their infectious attitude provides the motivation and energy needed to engage others in the difficult work of teaching.

Open-mindedness and humility. Respect for colleagues and a desire to collaborate with others contribute to teacher leaders' ability to maintain an open mind and consider all options. They do not presume to have answers, but passionately engage with others in seeking them. They possess a sense of humility that is an important ingredient in developing trusting relationships among their colleagues.

Courage, willingness to take risks, and perseverance. Teacher leaders think creatively and assess rigorously. They view their work as continuously changing rather than routine and habitual. They are able to support others for as long as needed to ensure the successful implementation of new practices. Teacher leaders seek to understand the causes of resistance to change and respond appropriately to individual needs and concerns. They acknowledge the adaptive and situated nature of teaching and student learning. Consequently, these leaders accept that no one roadmap or silver bullet exists for every situation. By modeling courage and determination, they help shape a culture and safe environment where risk-taking, experimentation, and inquiry are valued. Teacher leaders are also comfortable operating with a sense of uncertainty.

Confidence, flexibility, and decisiveness. Having demonstrated success with teaching and learning in their own careers, teacher leaders have both the confidence and efficacy to continue to grow and learn as professionals. Their self-confidence enables them to remain flexible in most situations so they can make appropriate decisions. With these attributes, teacher leaders engender collective confidence and efficacy among their peers.

Commitment and passion to ongoing learning.
Teacher leaders are committed to their own continuous improvement. Teacher leaders also hold a growth mindset and believe everyone has the capacity to grow and develop, both students and adults. They are willing to do what it takes to increase their knowledge of content and pedagogy, collaboration, teambuilding, and other leadership skills.

Scenario

Jamaal enjoys his service as a supervising teacher for student teachers. He considers it one way he gives back to the profession. During the last semester the local university offered all supervising teachers an opportunity to join a semester-long, weekly online community to share their experiences, challenges, and successes working with student teachers. As a person who is committed to continuous improvement, Jamaal jumped at the chance.

During these online meetings, Jamaal and others talked often about their own teaching practices and shared resources, instructional strategies, and interventions for students in their classroom. Together they considered how their level of experience compared to that of novice teachers influenced their decision making; willingness to implement new practices; comfort with the unknown; and flexibility within their practice. Jamaal found the sessions to be invigorating and looked forward to them as a way of growing and learning about the craft of teaching. After each call, he reflected on the ideas shared, prioritized the ones he wanted to implement, and selected those to share with his student teacher. Community members had an unwritten expectation that they would report back to the community about ideas they implemented and the results they achieved so they could compare and analyze effects.

Before engaging with others in the community, Jamaal had not considered himself a teacher leader. In fact, when he had thought about teacher leaders, he had envisioned coaches and teachers on special assignment, but not those, like himself, who served as mentors or supervising teachers. "After all," Jamaal had reasoned, "our positions don't require us to leave teaching for some or all of the day; we don't have special titles or performance expectations." In Jamaal's view he always had provided a voluntary service and had minimal special preparation. He also had considered his influence in a narrow way because he tended to work with only one student teacher a year and often had little interaction with them after their required service. Yet, as a result of engaging with other supervising teachers, many of whom view themselves as teacher leaders, Jamaal has realized that he is a leader.

In several weekly sessions, Jamaal and his colleagues discussed teacher leadership and shared their perspectives on what it means. They agreed that teacher leadership is less about a designated formal role that removed them from their classrooms, or even about the number of people they influenced. Rather, they said that teacher leadership is more about their passion and willingness to contribute to the profession. They concluded that teacher leaders are those who share a set of dispositions that include commitment to growth, professional collaboration, collective responsibility for student success, willingness to examine their practice publicly using evidence, analysis, and reflection, and dedication to cultivating expertise with other professionals. They realized that teacher leadership is not only about the roles they have within their schools and districts, but also about how they actively influence and contribute to the overall success of their students, peers, schools, school systems, and school communities.

Jamaal and a small group of his community colleagues continued to meet in an online community long after the semester ended, and they invited their student teachers to join them. They have found a renewed purpose for the weekly discussion and also have developed appreciation of the diverse perspectives that led to continuous growth for all community members and their students. Together, they are cultivating a broader understanding and appreciation of their identity and influence as teacher leaders.

Questions to consider

1. What dispositions are necessary for teachers to become teacher leaders?
2. How are school system, school, and teacher leaders cultivating dispositions for teacher leadership?
3. Which teacher leader dispositions are most important for teacher leaders to demonstrate given the identified goals and purposes of teacher leadership?
4. How might school system and school leaders integrate teacher leadership into normative practice so that the need for any specialized effort related to teacher leadership is unnecessary?
5. How do teachers develop and sustain the dispositions and desire to lead?
6. How can teacher leaders support other teachers to find their own "inner leader"?

A core component of a successful system of teacher leadership is ongoing formative and summative assessment of its effects on students, peers, schools, school systems, school communities, and teacher leaders themselves. Teacher leaders and their supervisors use data about the impact of teacher leadership to adjust and refine teacher leadership programs and individual teacher leader performance. Ultimately, measuring the effects of teacher leadership provides information that may be applied to strengthen teachers' leadership practice and its impact on peers and students.

Actions

- Develop ongoing processes that expect and support teacher leaders to reflect on, assess, and adjust their practice based on evidence;
- Create fair and equitable systems for supervising and evaluating teacher leaders that integrate feedback and coaching teachers in leadership roles;
- Evaluate the effectiveness of various teacher leader roles on professional practice and student success.

Rationale

Teacher leaders want to know the effects of their efforts on peers, students, schools, school systems, and their community so that they may improve their practice. Their ongoing effort to assess the impact of their practice demonstrates their commitment to data-driven, continuous improvement. To be intentional with continuous improvement, teacher leaders set clear goals that shape the focus of their actions and describe desired successes. Typical goals for teacher leadership within schools include increases in student academic performance, peer professional growth, and collaboration and relational trust within a school.

Evaluation of the impact of teacher leadership focuses on measuring the influence and effects of individual teacher leaders and teacher leadership programs; it is best accomplished as a collaborative effort among teacher leaders, teachers they support, and their supervisors. Sometimes, teacher leaders or a steering committee may enlist an external evaluator to conduct a formal program evaluation, although not all teacher leadership efforts will require this level of evaluation. Both external and internal evaluation, when based on valid data in multiple forms and from multiple sources, is useful in assessing and evaluating the effectiveness of teacher leadership.

Three possible areas of focus make sense for any evaluation of teacher leadership. One is examining the overall programmatic features of teacher leadership including the supports available; opportunities for leadership; systems and structures through which it operates; and its overall effectiveness, efficiency, and impact on identified clients. Evaluations at this level occur annually when the program is in its first several years, intermittently after it is established, and again annually when major adjustments are made to the program design or operation.

The second area of focus is the performance evaluation of individual teacher leaders. This area includes examining the practices of teacher leaders using established performance criteria aligned to their role and responsibilities. It also includes the effects of their practice on others including colleagues and student performance. Evaluations at this level occur annually for the purpose of ongoing improvement. The third area is the individual and collaborative reflection that teacher leaders conduct about their own practice; it includes self-assessment using data and established criteria. This level of evaluation occurs continuously. Whether the evaluation is formal or informal, knowing the area of focus for the evaluation will help an evaluator select which data to examine and identify appropriate sources of those data and methodology for collecting the data.

To assess the impact of their efforts related to identified goals, teacher leaders, in collaboration with their peers and supervisors, identify indicators of success that serve as criteria against which to measure progress toward the goal. Some common indicators of success include student performance data; frequency of collaboration with teachers within a school; types of supports provided; access to and value of professional learning; degree of relational trust; teacher retention rates, teacher and administrator perceptions; and teacher performance data. Data that assess the effects of teacher leadership might be gathered from teachers, students, administrators, other teacher leaders, and artifacts such as logs and student work. Some common methods for gathering data might include observations, document analysis, or surveys, focus groups, or interviews with teachers who are supported by teacher leaders or others with knowledge about the efforts of teacher leaders.

With indicators of success specified for each goal, evaluators identify appropriate data collection methods and data sources for each goal, set a schedule for collecting and analyzing data, and analyze the data. Evaluators then facilitate collaboration among the stakeholders to engage them in interpreting the data related to: (a) the goals and purpose of teacher leadership; (b) their roles and responsibilities; (c) the culture and structures that support teacher leadership; and (d) its impact. Evaluators conclude the assessment process with a report of the data analysis and implications for teacher leadership. Teacher leaders, their peers, and supervisors, as well as other school or district leaders will use the report to inform decision making about their teacher leadership system.

Scenario

School system leaders reported that they valued teacher leadership. When asked whether teachers had opportunities to become leaders, they identified numerous available opportunities and cited examples of teacher leadership. Yet teachers' perceptions differed. To understand the different views, district leaders together with the teacher association agreed to gather data from principals and teachers. Data collected from a survey, interviews, and focus groups revealed that teacher leadership was an option for only a selected few teachers identified by principals. Often, leadership included representation without influence, and there was no overt process to become a leader. Those in the role of teacher leader felt privileged to be identified as a leader, yet felt unsupported and uncertain about their responsibilities and roles.

The superintendent appointed a special task force to design a process for gathering more data annually about the effectiveness of the school system's efforts in teacher leadership. She asked that the task force consider a 360-degree view of teacher leadership. As a result, the task force designed a brief survey for teachers and principals to gather their views about the opportunities and roles for teacher leadership within the district; types of interactions with and supports from teacher leaders; and perceived value of teacher leadership in achieving school system and school goals. The task force developed a survey for teacher leaders about their work, professional learning, support, and supervision. They also created criteria and expectations for teacher leadership that served both as a self-assessment and as the basis for an annual review of teacher-leader performance. This yearlong effort incorporated multiple opportunities for input and review by teachers and principals as the various tools were developed.

These tools became valuable means for gathering annual data about the effectiveness of the school system's teacher leadership efforts. The data helped school system, school, and teacher leaders understand the adjustments needed to strengthen the impact of teacher leadership and expand it to other teachers. In addition, the data included the voices of those who most closely interacted with and benefitted from teacher leaders. Teacher leaders used the aggregated school and school system data to analyze their own practices and to inform their professional growth plans. By monitoring, assessing, and measuring the impact of teacher leadership, leaders increased its value and impact within the system. The annual data-gathering and reporting on the findings helped expand teachers' and principals' understanding of teacher leadership and contributed to teachers' growing interest in becoming leaders.

Questions to consider

1. What are the indicators of success for teacher leadership?

2. How will the overall effectiveness of teacher leadership be evaluated? How often will it be evaluated? What data will be used to inform the evaluation?

3. How will teacher leaders be evaluated? Who is responsible for evaluating teacher leaders?

4. How are data from the evaluation of teacher leadership and teacher leaders used? Who accesses and uses the data?

5. How are the conditions that support teacher leadership, such as time, materials, technology, professional learning, coaching, etc., assessed in an evaluation of teacher leadership?

6. What is the role of teacher leader analysis, reflection, and self-generated feedback in assessment and evaluation of the impact of their work?

7. How do teacher leaders use data about the impact of their work to refine their practice and its impact?

Conclusion

The work of a teacher leader is often undefined, unsupported, and sometimes unrecognized and undervalued, thus limiting the potential for positive impact. The systemic approach described in this paper provides guidance to add consistency, substance, and shape to the concept and practice of teacher leadership so that it can have its greatest impact on students, their teachers and schools, and the profession at large. Like other leaders in education, teacher leaders work in service of others. Given their intimate connection with classrooms and the daily professional practice of their peers, teacher leaders' influence on teaching and learning may have an even greater impact than other forms of leadership within schools and school systems. According to Greenleaf's (2002) model of servant leadership, key traits of a servant leader include listening, empathy, awareness of self and others, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to growth, and community building.

Indeed, how teacher leaders treat others is key to leadership success. Being available and present for others, listening with a desire to understand, acknowledging contributions of others and sharing collective credit for accomplishments are specific behaviors that help to build a sense of community among members of an organization. As servant leaders, teacher leaders understand that their belief in others' capabilities and conveying that belief in words and actions will result in ordinary people accomplishing extraordinary things. They demonstrate commitment to growth by leading through example. Teacher leaders focus on people as the core purpose for and benefactor of any innovation, adults, and students alike. They understand that talking about what should be done and doing it are not the same

thing. They are committed, therefore, to moving beyond good intentions into actions that result in goal attainment.

Each of these traits is grounded in the consideration of others' views, input, and feedback. Since teacher leadership, in large measure, is about collaboratively moving educators forward in their professional journey, the ability to work in service to the greater good is paramount to being a successful teacher leader.

The capacity for teacher leadership to flourish is a joint responsibility of teachers, the school systems within which they work, and the broader educational and policy context. While many teachers quietly and successfully assume leadership without any of the surrounding supports identified in this paper, the potential for their ongoing growth and expanded impact on the system as a whole is limited. A systemic approach to teacher leadership elevates the significance, visibility, and viability of teacher leadership as a means of improving teaching and learning. School leaders or steering committees that develop a rational, vigorous system of teacher leadership will benefit as more teachers, especially those committed to continuous growth and professional success, seek to serve and succeed as teacher leaders. When teacher leadership is developed systemically within a school, district, state, or provincial system, it leads not only to the success of educators, but also to that of their students.

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The authors of this report, practitioners with decades of experience working in schools and school systems, bring together their best thinking and practical expertise to dig into the practical aspects of teacher leadership. In their work with national, state, district, and school leaders who include dedicated teachers, they have collective wisdom to share with others who want to elevate teacher leadership to improve student learning, the teaching profession, and schools as centers of learning for both students and educators alike.

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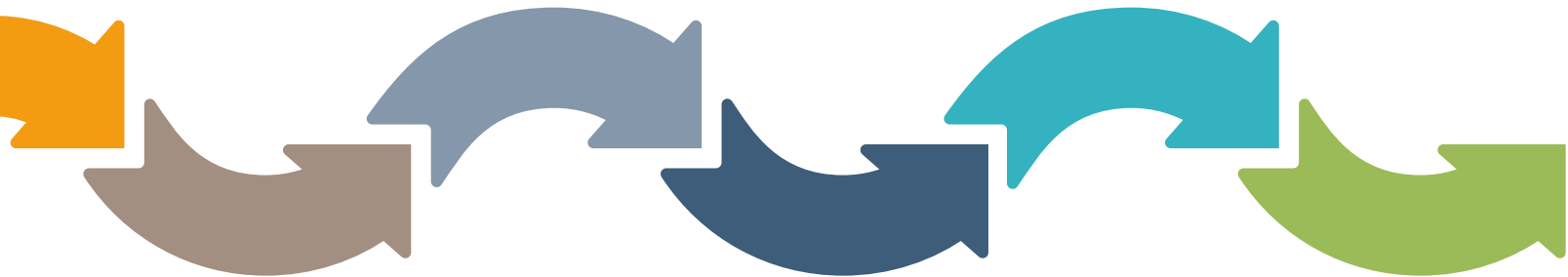
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