

INTRODUCTION

Illinois' Teacher Leader Endorsement (TLE) was introduced in 2012 with the intention of solving two problems. First, many teachers were pursuing Type 75 administrative certificates in order to earn a master's degree and advance on the salary scale without transitioning to an administrative role. As a result, districts paid higher salaries to these teachers even though they were not putting this learning to use in new leadership roles. Second, many teachers who were not interested in administrative positions found their options for career advancement extremely limited. The new endorsement, designed specifically to promote leadership from the classroom, was intended to open up new career pathways and help keep highly effective teachers in the classroom.

By 2018, TLE programs were established at universities across the state, and more than 400 teachers had earned the endorsement.¹ With implementation well underway, our team of Illinois teachers and Teach Plus Teaching Policy Fellows decided to investigate how effective this new endorsement has been in promoting teacher leadership and providing additional opportunities for teacher leadership in Illinois in its first five years. We looked at the effectiveness of TLE programs, as reported by those who completed them, and asked whether the endorsement was working as intended to help teachers move into leadership roles in their schools.

In this brief, we detail our findings and offer some recommendations for increasing teacher leadership in Illinois based on survey responses of endorsement holders. We also highlight additional research into promising approaches to teacher leadership from across the country.

Findings

1. Most teachers who pursue the TLE do so because they want to lead from the classroom or fill specific teacher leadership roles, as the endorsement intended.
2. TLE programs develop the leadership skills of those enrolled, giving them greater perspective and preparing them effectively to serve in teacher leadership roles.
3. At some institutions, the TLE program was perceived as a lesser version of the administrative credential, rather than a unique program geared toward teacher leaders.
4. Very few districts specifically recognize the TLE in hiring or salary structures, leading to some teachers being disappointed in the opportunities the endorsement affords.
5. Research into teacher leadership efforts in other states offers complementary or alternate strategies to strengthen the TLE specifically and teacher leadership generally.



Recommendations

1. School districts should explicitly list the TLE as one of several qualifications for hiring teachers for leadership roles and/or in the salary structures used by the district.
2. ISBE should promote awareness of the TLE among teachers and school districts in order to make the TLE a catalyst for effective teacher leadership.
3. ISBE should evaluate the effectiveness of individual TLE programs to ensure that the goals of the endorsement are being met and that teacher leadership programs are meaningfully differentiated from administrative programs.
4. ISBE should implement micro-credentialing for teacher leadership skills as a low-barrier intermediate step that could eventually lead to the full endorsement.

BACKGROUND: DEVELOPMENT OF THE TEACHER LEADERSHIP ENDORSEMENT

Interest in teacher leadership has been growing across the country for decades. In 2008, a group of educators began surveying current research on teacher leadership to examine the “critical leadership roles that teachers play in contributing to student and school success.”² The group grew into the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, whose members included both national teacher unions, six state departments of education, and a number of colleges and universities. This group published its work in a report titled *Teacher Leader Model Standards*.³ Among the consortium’s findings are that teacher leadership can enhance the capacity of administration, support strategies and behaviors linked to increasing student achievement, and increase teacher retention by offering new career opportunities.

While the report recognizes that teacher leadership is not a one-size-fits-all solution to the complex challenges in education, it does emphasize the unique capacities of classroom-embedded teacher leaders to elevate the profession when following best practices for leadership. As district leaders struggle to keep up with expanding policies, mandates, and challenges, training teachers to assist in leadership roles has become an increasingly attractive option. To this end, the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium released model standards that span seven domains. Though the Illinois administrative code governing the Teacher Leadership Endorsement (TLE) did not adopt these model standards, many of the descriptors of effective teacher leadership overlap, demonstrating that standards for teacher leadership in Illinois are well-aligned with current best practices.⁴

Teacher leadership continues to gain traction as a means to resolving school and student challenges while providing new career pathways for classroom teachers. Classroom teachers who have completed leadership training offer schools a broader perspective and serve as a valuable resource when these challenges arise. Additionally, teachers feel more included in making school-wide decisions and have more options for career advancement while remaining in the classroom, promoting long-term retention.

METHODOLOGY

Our research was designed to answer the following questions about the Teacher Leader Endorsement in its first five years:

- + Why have teachers pursued the Teacher Leader Endorsement?
- + Is the Teacher Leader Endorsement meeting its goals?
- + How is the Teacher Leader Endorsement being used in schools?
- + Are teachers satisfied with the Teacher Leader Endorsement?

To answer these questions, we began by conducting a review of the literature surrounding teacher leadership to identify common strategies across states and those with strong track records of effectiveness, as well as provide context for interpretation of the survey results.

To conduct our survey, we identified all 426 TLE completers from the first five years that TLE programs were offered through a Freedom of Information Act request of the Illinois State Board of Education. Illinois Teaching Policy Fellows then reached out to a randomized sample of 68 individuals holding the TLE. Phone interviews were completed with 13 of those individuals between January 31st and February 28, 2018. The qualitative data from these interviews helped address our research questions and inform the development of a broader survey.

Utilizing the qualitative information, we created and distributed a survey to all teachers holding a TLE whose email addresses we could identify from publicly available information such as school website contact pages. Sixty-three individuals responded, representing 20 percent of those contacted. This sample represents a cross-section of Illinois educators who studied at institutions conferring the TLE.

FINDINGS

1. Most teachers who pursue the TLE do so because they want to lead from the classroom or fill specific teacher leadership roles, as the endorsement intended.

When the TLE was established in 2012, it provided an opportunity for teachers interested in pursuing leadership roles while remaining in their classrooms. It is thus significant that 77 percent of survey respondents indicated that they had considered an administrative degree, but pursued a teacher leadership path instead, with many offering comments like, “I wanted to have some sort of leadership role in education, but being a school principal was not something I wanted to pursue.”⁵ This suggests that the endorsement fills a real need, and that teachers find value in a TLE separate from principal preparation.

Many teachers hoped that the endorsement would either help them pursue leadership in non-administrative roles, or expand their ability to influence the policies that affected their students. Teachers hoped that the TLE would make them eligible for roles as coaches, mentors, and department chairs, among others, as evident from several typical responses:

“I wanted to become more knowledgeable about being a change agent. I wanted to be better equipped to take on the task of working alongside [policy-makers] and stakeholders.”

- Elementary & middle school teacher, Chicago.

- + *"As someone who has always taken on leadership roles, I wanted to continue on that path. I was told that this endorsement would be what I needed to be a divisional chair, instructional coach, and other lead teacher positions."
- High school teacher, now in California.*
- + *"I pursued a teacher leadership endorsement to have the ability to become a mentor teacher and/or a department head in my current district."
- High school teacher, Chicago suburbs*
- + *"[I pursued the TLE] so I could receive more training on leadership in education and prepare myself for a possible next stepping stone in my career to better lead CTE programs in a department chair position or district office position."
- High school teacher and union representative, rural Illinois*

With expanded opportunities for leadership positions being a key motivating factor, it is important that the TLE actually work to open doors for those positions, or teachers may not pursue the endorsement. This issue is explored further later in this report.

Other teachers said they were interested in developing their ability to advocate for students and to ensure their voices were heard by administration. For example, one suburban public middle school teacher said the endorsement would help them "find a balance between classroom teaching and being an advocate and decision maker for schools and students." Several teachers indicated that they hoped to earn more respect, such as a high school instructional coach who wrote, "The Teacher Leader Endorsement would allow me to be heard and give me more credibility with my co-workers and administrators." Many teachers feel they do not have a voice in the decisions that affect their classroom, as noted in the ["Voices from the Classroom"](#) report from Educators for Excellence⁶, and there was some evidence that finding that voice may be one of the reasons teachers pursue the TLE.

Conversely, eight of the 61 open responses described the TLE as merely a component or step within a larger administrative degree program. A public elementary school teacher downstate said it "was required to participate in the practicum to obtain the principal endorsement," and an urban assistant principal wrote, "I was already working on my master's degree in Admin, so I also qualified for the TL endorsement."

This evidence suggests that while most teachers pursue the endorsement for the reasons envisioned when it was established, some only do so as a requirement for completing a larger program.

One reason that teachers pursued the TLE was that it was part of a master's program that would qualify them for a significant salary increase. Sixty percent of respondents indicated that their salary increased because their TLE program led to a master's degree, while only one of the 61 respondents worked for a district

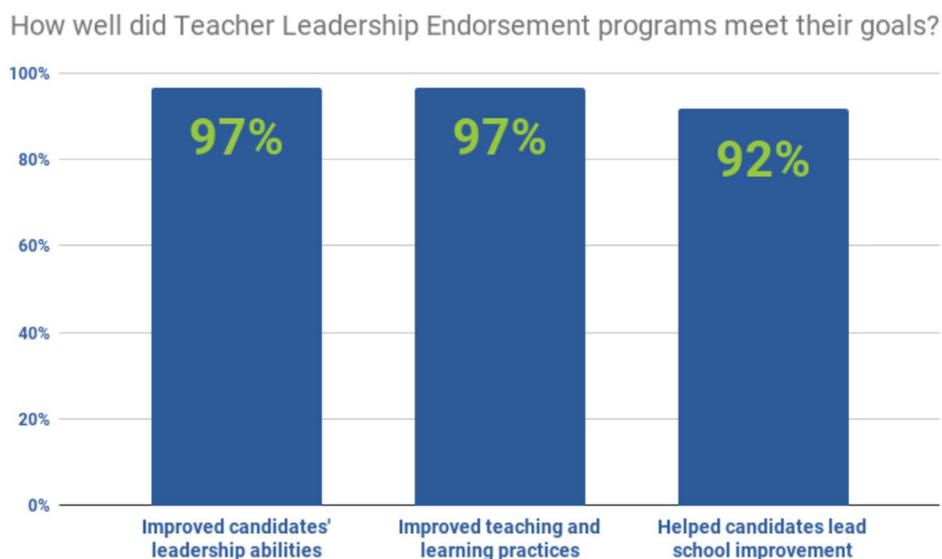
that offered a monetary incentive for the TLE specifically. It appears that offering the TLE as part of a graduate program is an important incentive because it works within traditional teacher salary schedules. However, because this incentive is generally not tied to the leadership endorsement itself, later in this report we also explore alternate means to encourage teachers to earn the TLE.

Only one of the 61 respondents worked for a district that offered a monetary incentive for the TLE specifically

2. TLE programs develop the leadership skills of those enrolled, giving them greater perspective and preparing them effectively to serve in teacher leadership roles.

The Teacher Leader Endorsement outlines five specific skill sets that teacher leaders should possess, effectively setting outcome guidelines for preparation programs: leading schools, designing professional development, building school culture, using assessments, and collaborating with others.⁷ Feedback from teachers indicates that the rigor and content of teacher leader programs are successfully cultivating these qualities of leadership among those enrolled in the programs. Respondents to the survey had an overwhelmingly positive impression of their coursework and training.

Figure 1: Meeting the Goals of the Teacher Leadership Endorsement ⁸



More than 95 percent of teachers thought their programs prepared them “very well” or “somewhat well” for the goals of improving their leadership abilities and their teaching and learning practice. Over 90 percent thought their training helped them to lead improvement in their schools. These results show strong satisfaction with the preparation provided by TLE programs.

Answers to short response questions, while generally more critical of specific programs and courses, highlight many of the positive outcomes reported in the data. When asked which courses were most beneficial, educators repeatedly referred to school law courses as informative, shaping their perspectives on handling school- and district-wide issues. Other courses that drew praise included training on teacher evaluation and identifying quality instruction. Responses frequently indicated that participants had developed a more informed perspective on decision-making within their schools.

Beyond the skills and knowledge specific to school leadership, respondents also indicated they had grown personally as they earned the TLE. Nearly all responses indicated that participants had developed greater confidence and communication

skills. Respondents linked their increased confidence to courses that strengthened their knowledge base and provided a broader perspective on school leadership. Regardless of whether or not they held a leadership position at the time, respondents felt the endorsement made them more effective speakers and listeners, and better able to gather data and make informed decisions. A rural elementary school teacher encapsulated this broadened understanding, noting, “I have learned how

“The best part has been that I now can identify leadership qualities in myself, but more importantly in others. For example, everyone talks negatively about admin at the school and district levels, but going through the courses has helped me explain many nuances and situations that help shine light on the actual problems, rather than just blaming the leaders in charge.”

***- Elementary school teacher,
Chicago suburbs***

to look at situations globally instead of having tunnel vision.” Another rural elementary mentor teacher felt she “gained a level of respect from Administration and became a resource.” Educators feel that the endorsement puts them in a position to better understand and communicate with stakeholders around a multitude of issues.

These responses also suggest that current TLE programs meet the goal of the endorsement to “[promote] shared governance and leadership in schools,” as a number of educators noted greater understanding of leadership challenges, which will help them participate more meaningfully in critical conversations. As most educators agreed that TLE programs built their confidence and communication skills, this may indicate that the programs are also meeting the goal of improving school climate, which partly derives from positive communication.

Respondents did offer suggestions for improvement, largely centered on making coursework more directly applicable to real-world education leadership positions. A rural principal summarized this by saying, “The more practical you can make the experience, the better. The more hands on, or based in actual experiences with their school, the better.” Likewise, a rural elementary mentor teacher argued, “There really should be no courses that involve sit and get.” Teacher-generated ideas for additional course topics included: teacher evaluation training, school budgets, assessment creation, data collection and analysis to inform instruction, curriculum and instruction knowledge to help other teachers improve their practice, coaching techniques, creating school and teacher schedules, staff management, special education, and creating high-quality professional development for adults.

Finally, the impact of the endorsement appears to be greatest on the educators’ view of self, while the programs’ ties to student outcomes are tenuous at best. Little was said by teachers about the impact on student outcomes, which is an explicitly stated goal of the endorsement. Exploring the reasons for this gap was outside the scope of our research. In addition, as the TLE is relatively new, it may take time to see measurable impact on student outcomes. One suggestion we offer for further research is to investigate whether having at least one teacher with the endorsement positively affects a school’s performance on student-focused indicators.

3. At some institutions, the TLE program was perceived as a lesser version of the administrative credential, rather than a unique program geared toward teacher leaders.

Many teachers noted with displeasure the similarity between TLE and principal programs. A suburban high school teacher and instructional coach noted that the principal preparation program and the Teacher Leader Endorsement program within the same institutions have “quite a bit of overlap,” and recommended teachers pursue a principal preparation program instead of the TLE. A suburban high school assistant principal and department chair noted that the principal preparation program “does the same thing and offers a better internship program to allow teachers to really dig into the standards and work with a bigger group of people.” Taken as a whole, responses suggested that at least some TLE programs were essentially the same as the institution’s principal preparation program, but without the internship experience required of future principals, they amount to an “incomplete” principal program as opposed to one specifically designed to develop teacher leaders.

Some respondents felt that the current overlap negatively affected their ability to get the most out of the TLE program. An urban elementary charter school teacher said, “My capstone class was not super helpful/meaningful because most of my class was principal prep students. Maybe having specific cohorts of just TLE would solve this.” A rural high school teacher and PLC leader noted, “I feel like a majority of the coursework and lectures were geared toward being a building administrator and I do not want to become one!” An elementary charter school teacher from Chicago went so far as to say that the capstone experience was hindered because “most of my class was principal prep students” and suggested that having cohorts with only TLE candidates would improve the program. These responses suggest a desire for greater distance between the programs.

Other teachers felt that rather than separating the two, clearly connecting the TLE endorsement and principal preparation programs would result in a more well-planned and clearly outlined progression. A suburban middle school department chair suggested, “Set up the TLE courses so that some of them could be easily transferred to an administrative endorsement program.” Others felt that the programs were so similar they should be the same. A suburban high school mentor teacher shared, “I’m currently pursuing my Principal Endorsement and the only difference is 2 additional classes and internships. Just make it one program!” While these proposed paths to change are very different from each other, teachers agree that well-planned changes need to take place in order to better delineate between the TLE and the principal preparation program, or at least to more purposefully align the two.

These responses suggest that at least some of the universities that are offering the endorsement are straying from its original intent to provide an opportunity distinct from administrative preparation. It may be that the TLE program at these institutions is simply a portion of the principal program that has been repurposed or repackaged. This is worth investigating further because if the overlap between these programs is significant, teachers at those institutions may not be receiving the differentiated value that the TLE was designed to provide. Not only that, but if programs treat the TLE as a lesser or incomplete version of a more in-depth program, it may devalue the TLE — both in the eyes of administrators who continue on to earn the “complete” degree, and also in the eyes of teachers who may find their program does not earn them respect from those administrators.

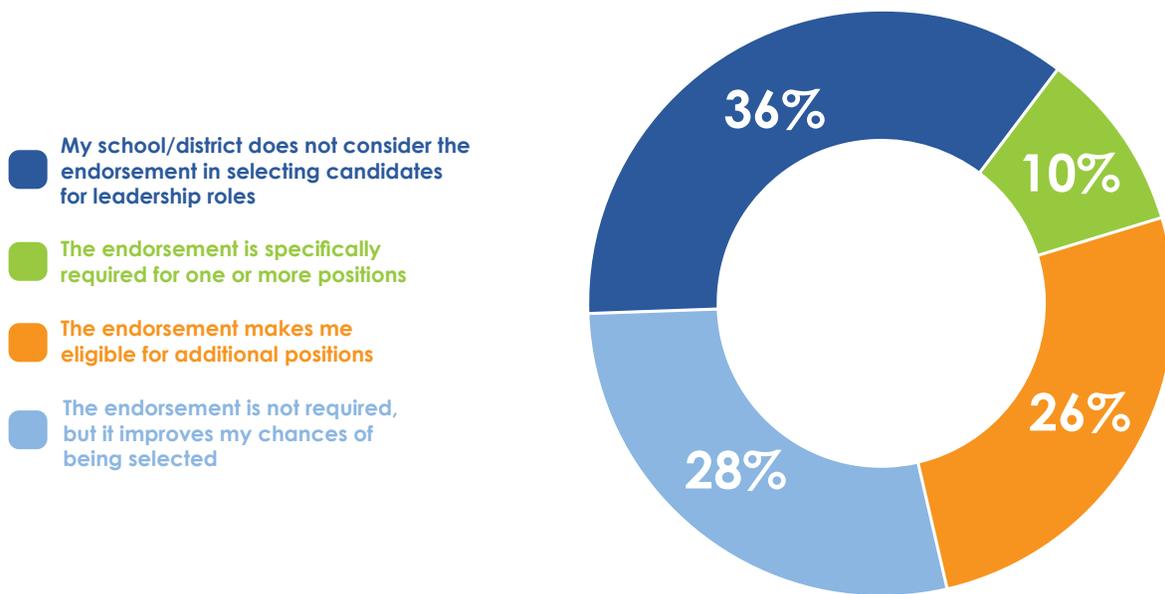
4. Very few districts specifically recognize the TLE in hiring or salary structures, leading to some teachers being disappointed in the opportunities the endorsement affords.

While the endorsement appears to prepare teachers well for leadership roles, it does not formally qualify them for leadership roles. Ninety-two percent of endorsement holders said that they felt somewhat or very well prepared to take on leadership roles.⁹ In practice, however, there is a clear disconnect between the goals of the TLE and the value districts place on the endorsement. Only 10 percent of respondents indicated that the endorsement was specifically required for teacher leadership positions within their districts (see Figure 2), leading one middle school teacher to remark, “Having the title ‘sounds nice’ but it holds no water.” This comment reinforces the findings of a 2016 survey conducted by the Illinois P-20 council in which 95 percent of administrators reported that the endorsement was not required to hold teacher leadership positions in their districts.¹⁰ However, 54 percent of the teachers we surveyed said that the TLE, while not specifically required to hold leadership positions, was one of several possible qualifying criteria or enhanced their chances of being selected for leadership positions in their districts.

“Having the title ‘sounds nice’ but it holds no water.”

Figure 2: The Teacher Leadership Endorsement’s Impact on Teacher Leadership Roles ¹¹

Does the endorsement help teachers obtain leadership roles?



More troubling is that many teachers felt there were misconceptions about the opportunities that would be available to them once they held the endorsement. A high school teacher requested that TLE programs “be realistic with those pursuing this endorsement about the outcome.” A suburban middle school teacher suggested, “Continue to supply information for employment opportunities with this endorsement.” While many teachers identified eligibility for new positions as a major motivating factor, only one survey respondent actually noted being selected for a new role as a result of holding the endorsement.

Participants' concerns are supported by the data. We asked teachers whether they currently held a formal leadership role in their schools (see figure 3). Forty-one percent of survey respondents do not currently hold a formal leadership position. Seventeen percent are in administrative positions rather than serving as teacher leaders. The remaining 42 percent held a non-administrative leadership role.¹²

For those teachers serving in a leadership role, the most common roles were as a leader of a professional learning community, a mentor teacher, or department chair. Nearly 30 percent of teachers listed "other" as a leadership position, and those positions ranged from building representative to grade level lead to committee chairs. While our survey did not differentiate between roles teachers took on after earning their TLE and those held prior to earning the endorsement, the high percentage of teachers with no leadership role suggests that achievement of the Teacher Leader Endorsement has not yet been connected to formally recognized teacher leadership roles within schools.

Figure 3: Current Leadership Roles ¹³

Do you currently hold a school leadership position?

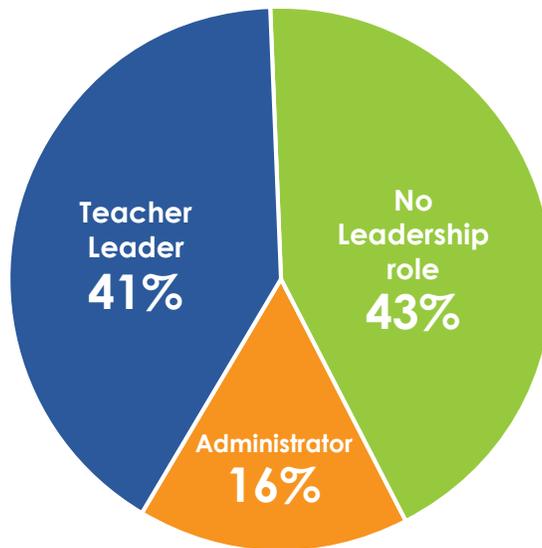
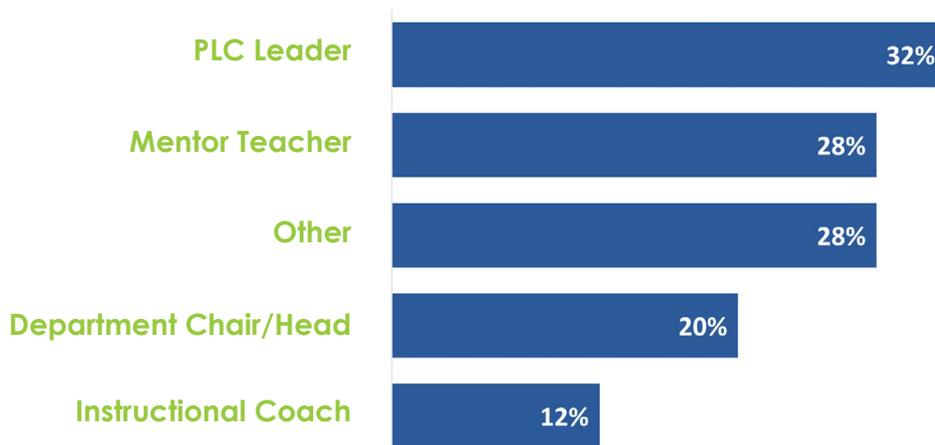


Figure 4: Most Common Teacher Leadership Roles ¹⁴

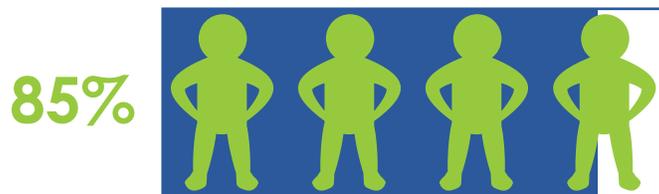
Most frequently-held teacher leadership roles



Some teachers attributed the lack of teacher leadership roles for which they are qualified to ISBE. A middle school teacher said, “If the state rolls out an endorsement, the state should be able to back it up,” and a high school instructional coach noted, “[ISBE] authorized the creation of the program, but stopped short of giving it credibility by not stating that the Teacher Leadership Endorsement is a requirement for applicable decisions.” We recognize that requiring the endorsement for teacher leadership positions is problematic, given the varied nature of teacher leadership roles and the relatively small pool of endorsed candidates. It is possible that this is simply a transition period during which the TLE is emerging as one of several options for those pursuing a leadership path, but is not yet recognized as a necessary component or even the best preparation for those roles. There is a risk, however, that these potential teacher leaders will become discouraged if this gap is not closed, which could result in the endorsement being devalued, teachers leaving the classroom for purely administrative positions, or even potential teacher leaders leaving the profession.

Despite the lack of leadership roles available because of the endorsement, 85 percent of teacher respondents would recommend other teachers earn a Teacher Leader Endorsement.¹⁵ Open-ended responses revealed their reasoning, with representative remarks including:

- + a chance to learn “how other aspects of education work.” - High school mentor teacher, Chicago suburbs
- + growing “skills necessary to be more effective in a leadership role.” - Middle school mentor teacher, Chicago suburbs
- + gaining “important insight to school change.” - Department chair, Chicago suburbs
- + helping them “see a future as a teacher leader.” - Middle school teacher, Chicago suburbs



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A number of teachers qualified their recommendation, however, clarifying that they only recommended earning the endorsement as part of a master’s degree program that would result in a pay increase. This recommendation seems to be based less on the quality of the endorsement program or the opportunities it affords, and more on the financial incentive of increased pay, and it hints at the misalignment of the goals of the TLE with hiring practices or salary policies in school districts. We note that since any advanced degree would lead to a pay raise in most districts, this does not represent a strong argument specifically in favor of the TLE.

5. Research into teacher leadership efforts in other states offers complementary or alternate strategies to strengthen the TLE specifically and teacher leadership generally.

In our review of the literature surrounding teacher leadership, we noted that many other states are also finding ways to recognize teacher leadership. Our landscape analysis yielded several examples of how states are either using teacher leadership as a transition to move teachers into administrative roles or creating new initiatives that support teacher leadership in other ways.

Several states are creating new organizations to help develop teacher leadership. The Hawaii State Department of Education created The Leadership Institute in 2013 to create professional development opportunities for all teachers to develop their leadership skills in order to establish a culture of leadership amongst all teachers and administrators.¹⁶ Hawaii's Teacher Leader Academy provides job-embedded professional development for teachers who wish to improve their own professional practice and help their colleagues do the same. Kentucky has created a Teacher Leadership Framework defining six core ways that teachers can lead from the classroom and describing the knowledge and skills required for each.¹⁷ Washington offers a Teacher Leader Fellows program as a pathway into teacher leadership. These fellows participate in professional learning and engage in leadership opportunities to support district, school, or organizational implementation of the Washington State Learning Standards.¹⁸

Other states have created and defined Teacher Leader Endorsements similar to Illinois'. The Idaho State Board of Education offers a Consulting Teacher/Teacher Leader Endorsement. Consulting teachers help to select teaching materials and instructional strategies, and also design and implement sustained, job-embedded professional learning for teachers.¹⁹

Some states or large districts have partnered with teacher leadership organizations to develop leadership opportunities. These organizations can help train and equip teachers with leadership skills, expand their professional learning networks, and mobilize peers to positively impact students and communities by providing feedback and input on key education issues. For example, the Illinois State Board of Education requested that Teach Plus Illinois reach out to teachers statewide to gather their feedback on the state's ESSA plan. In Hawaii, Hope Street Fellows engage regularly with the Hawaii State Superintendent and state legislators. Chicago Public Schools currently partners with Teachers Supporting Teachers and the Chicago Foundation for Education to offer leadership roles to classroom teachers.

One state that has seen success in promoting teacher leadership is Tennessee. The state adopted the Teacher Leader Model Standards in 2011, giving them common language to use when defining teacher leadership. The Tennessee Teacher Leader Guidebook helps teachers choose a path for developing their own teacher leadership. Almost half of the school districts in Tennessee have joined the Teacher Leader Network (TLN) which provides them with both administrative and financial support in order to create their own individualized programs and structures for teacher leadership. Districts have designed professional development opportunities for teacher leaders, mentorships, and specific, compensated roles for teacher leaders who take on additional responsibilities.²⁰



Micro-credentialing: A Promising Alternative

As we have noted, there is a large disconnect between the TLE's value to teachers and its recognition by districts and ISBE. As currently designed, earning the endorsement typically requires a major investment of time and money to earn a master's degree. This creates a "chicken or egg" problem: If districts were to require the TLE for leadership positions, there would not be enough current endorsement holders to fill all the available leadership positions. On the other hand, if it is not recognized or valued by districts, then teachers have little incentive to pursue it.

The TLE is designed to encompass all teacher leadership priorities, but many teacher leadership roles do not require all those qualities. The skills needed in a student teacher mentor, for example, are different from those needed in a department chair or a content developer. Additionally, as noted above, a number of TLE holders shared that there was very little difference between the principal preparation program and the TLE program offered at the institution where they completed their coursework. In these cases, their leadership education may have been even more broad to encompass administrative skills and knowledge not relevant to teacher leadership.

In our literature review, we found several states turning to micro-credentialing to address these concerns. In a micro-credentialing system, teachers would demonstrate and be recognized for skills pertinent to the specific teacher leadership role they wish to hold. This level of specificity would allow districts to narrow teacher leader position requirements to the specific skills and attributes desired, making it more reasonable for districts to require this more specific credential without placing an undue burden on teachers. Many teachers take on leadership roles over the summer or even in the midst of the school year, and the flexibility to receive appropriate "just-in-time" training to address the skills needed in their new positions is important to their success. A micro-credential approach could offer pathways to credentialing through experience, coursework, or a combination thereof through competency measures, without the cumbersome process and cost of a full degree program.

Micro-credentialing is still in its infancy without comprehensive research on its effectiveness, but early research in states that have implemented the strategy comprehensively (Arkansas, Delaware, and Tennessee)²¹ show gains in the value that teachers attribute to their professional development. Teaching Matters, an organization that partners with schools to offer micro-credentials and trainings, shows measurable improvements for schools, teachers, and students where these programs have been implemented in New York City.²² In a Tennessee pilot program that offered teachers micro-credentials to meet continuing education requirements, feedback indicated that teachers appreciated the ability to select professional development.²³

Illinois has already introduced micro-credentialing in limited ways, with the most obvious parallel being micro-credentials in leadership skills offered by the Illinois Principal Association for administrative professional development.²⁴ One new system that would be necessary is a method of evaluating the work of those teacher leaders whose past experiences would qualify them for a micro-credential, but groups like Teaching Matters, Bloomboard, Digital Promise, and the Center for Teaching Quality are already offering this kind of credential based on experience, providing models for implementation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. School districts should explicitly list the TLE as one of several qualifications that could qualify teachers for hiring in certain leadership roles and/or in the salary structures used by the district.**

One of the most common conflicting themes we found in our research was that although the TLE programs prepared teachers to take on additional leadership roles, holding a TLE did not offer a meaningful advantage to them in obtaining leadership positions. The TLE will quickly become irrelevant if it is not valued in district hiring decisions or salary structures.

We recommend that districts phase in the TLE by explicitly listing it as one of several parallel qualifications for new hires in teacher leadership positions. Due to the relatively scarcity of teachers who hold the TLE, the variance in teacher leadership roles across districts, and the number of teacher leaders currently filling leadership roles successfully without the endorsement, we cannot recommend a blanket TLE requirement for teacher leadership positions like that which exists for administrative positions. Instead, districts can immediately establish the endorsement as one of several ways that new hires can demonstrate readiness for leadership positions.

Because the TLE effectively prepares teacher leaders to hold these roles, we encourage districts to thoughtfully consider how they might work toward requiring it for some teacher leadership positions. We suggest that any districts interested in establishing the TLE as a mandatory requirement for leadership positions do so with an effective date three to five years in the future to allow time for interested candidates to earn the endorsement. We also recommend that any such requirement be limited to new hires to prevent placing an undue burden on current teacher leaders who do not hold the TLE. These measures will help districts introduce the requirement gradually and thoughtfully, with careful consideration given to which positions should require the endorsement.

Finally, we recommend that districts either partner with an education preparation program that is providing the endorsement, or with a TLE micro-credential pilot (see below) so that the practical field experiences required to earn the endorsement can also address current district needs.

- 2. ISBE should promote awareness of the TLE among both teachers and school districts in order to make the TLE a catalyst for effective teacher leadership.**

We recommend that ISBE communicate the benefits of the TLE, including the findings offered in this report about the outcomes of TLE programs, to school district administration, teacher leadership networks, and state unions, and that ISBE also recommend its adoption as an endorsement criteria or incentive for teacher leadership positions.

While the benefits of the TLE for teacher leaders are clear from our research, far too few educators know about this opportunity for leadership development. The 2016 P-20 survey indicated that 75 percent of superintendents, 55 percent of principals, and only 24 percent of teachers were aware that this endorsement exists, which suggests that many administrators have some knowledge of the endorsement, but

are not passing this knowledge on to teachers or appreciating the value of the endorsement enough to incentivize teachers to earn it.²⁵ Given the value reported by those who have earned the endorsement, districts are missing an important opportunity to add value to their school leadership teams.

Raising awareness of both the existence and benefits of this endorsement will encourage districts to value it in hiring decisions. ISBE should accelerate this process by specifically recommending adoption of endorsement as a criteria for leadership positions, as detailed in our second recommendation.

3. ISBE should evaluate the effectiveness of individual TLE programs to ensure that the goals of the endorsement are being met and that teacher leadership programs are meaningfully differentiated from administrative programs.

The TLE was designed to offer an alternative to principal preparation programs for teachers interested in taking on leadership roles without leaving the classroom. Our research indicates that teachers' motivations are aligned with this goal, and that teachers believe that TLE programs are effective. There were, however, indications that not all of the programs are faithful to the original intent, and that in some cases there is considerable—or even complete—overlap with principal preparation programs.

In order to ensure that training for teacher leaders is distinct from that of administrators, ISBE should require TLE programs seeking approval or renewal through the State Educator Preparation and Licensure Board (SEPLB) to demonstrate how the program differs from principal preparation, if the provider offers both. This would allow SEPLB to ensure that there is meaningful differentiation that serves teacher leaders and to support improvement in programs where there is not.

Authority to hold program providers accountable for this differentiation is found in Section 21B-25(2)(E) of the School Code [105 ILCS 5]: “It shall be the policy of this State to improve the quality of instructional leaders by providing a career pathway for teachers interested in serving in leadership roles, but not as principals.” However, we also recommend that ISBE strengthen and clarify this expectation by amending 23 Ill. Adm. Code 25.32 (Teacher Leader Endorsement) to adopt the requirement that teacher leadership programs demonstrate meaningful differentiation from principal preparation programs, when institutions offer both.

4. ISBE should implement micro-credentialing for teacher leadership skills as a low-barrier intermediate step that could also lead to the full endorsement.

The current TLE lacks value for most teachers because it requires too much investment for too little incentive, and it lacks value for districts because the pool of endorsed teachers is too small and the endorsement process too involved to make it a reasonable expectation of candidates for leadership positions. Smaller, more focused credentials would help solve the chicken-and-egg problem by lowering both barriers. In addition, micro-credentials recognize that leadership is not one skill, but a package of skills, and that different skills are required in different positions, allowing districts to set credential requirements specific to each role. Recognizing teachers for leadership skills already demonstrated and incentivizing continued development in focused ways will help keep teachers in the profession and draw quality teachers to Illinois, encouraging more qualified teacher leadership across the state.

Over time, micro-credentials would also become an incremental path to the full endorsement for those initially unable to make a more significant commitment of time or money, as each micro-credential would both serve as one step on the path to full endorsement and also hold value on its own. Teacher leadership micro-credentials would also serve as a model for other professional development for teachers. For instance, teachers might pursue micro-credentials in working with specific groups of students like English language learners, or in specific instructional skillsets like anti-racist pedagogy, building their knowledge base and increasing effectiveness at a level below a specialty endorsement. Micro-credentials would also serve districts by providing a recognized training sequence that could be achieved in a reasonable time frame, such as a series of micro-credentials that a new department chair named in the spring could complete over the summer, preparing the new teacher leader for the role.

To implement micro-credentials, ISBE would need to create a “badge” or similar license credential system that represents defined skills, including those outlined in Section 25.32 of the Administrative Code, rather than a broad endorsement. These could be developed in partnership with existing micro-credential providers or with TLE providers. While certainly more resource-intensive for ISBE than an endorsement mandate, this approach is also less intrusive for districts, representing a nudge in the right direction rather than a directive from the state. It would not require a complete shift at the university level, as the coursework offered for the full endorsement could also be used to achieve micro-credentials.

One important note is that while TLE programs are currently only offered by institutions of higher education, it is entirely possible that nonprofit organizations or other entities could create rigorous, competency-based micro-credentialing systems, as they already have in other states. To account for this, ISBE should both establish quality standards for micro-credentials offered through these providers and also develop an articulation process to connect competency-based micro-credentials to TLE programs so that they are transferable for teachers who later decide to pursue the full endorsement and degree.

CONCLUSION

As accomplished teacher leaders who believe that distributed leadership is a powerful lever for schools to achieve better outcomes for students, we appreciate the steps Illinois has already taken to encourage teachers to lead from the classroom. We were also encouraged to find that participants valued the skills and knowledge gained in attaining the teacher leadership endorsement and that is accomplishing many of its intended goals.

However, it is also clear that the implementation of this endorsement needs to be better aligned with how teachers and districts will use it before it can be a significant driver of teacher leadership. By promoting the endorsement and establishing the endorsement more widely as a key factor in hiring and salary decisions, while lowering the barriers to entry and ensuring there is meaningful differentiation between teacher and administrative leadership preparation, Illinois can remain at the forefront of the teacher leadership movement nationally and prepare a new generation of leaders from the classroom.

ENDNOTES

¹ FOIA response from Illinois State Board of Education, dated 12/12/2017. As of that date, there were 426 holders of the Teacher Leader Endorsement.

² "Teacher Leader Model Standards." Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium. 6 June 2018. Retrieved August 8, 2018 from <http://www.nnstoy.org/download/leadership/Teacher%20Leader%20Standards.pdf>

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Section 25.32 Teacher Leader Endorsement. Retrieved August 3, 2018 from <https://www.ilga.gov/commission/jcar/admincode/023/023000250B00320R.html>

⁵ Question: "Did you consider pursuing an administrative endorsement?" (N=61). Responses "Yes" (77%), "No" (23%). Quote from Elementary School Teacher at an urban charter school.

⁶ Educators for Excellence, "Voices from the Classroom: A Survey of America's Educators." 2018. Retrieved August 3, 2018 from https://e4e.org/sites/default/files/2018_voices_from_the_classroom_teacher_survey.pdf

⁷ Section 25.32 Teacher Leader Endorsement. Retrieved August 3, 2018 from <https://www.ilga.gov/commission/jcar/admincode/023/023000250B00320R.html>

⁸ Question: "Given the coursework and training you received in order to earn your Teacher Leadership Endorsement, how well did your program do towards meeting the following goals:" (N=61) (Very well/Somewhat well/Not well at all/Not at all well) Improve your leadership abilities (N=61) 62%, 34%, 3%, 0% Improve your teaching and learning practices (N=61) 62%, 34%, 2%, 2% Help you lead improvement in your school (N=60) 63%, 28%, 5%, 3%

⁹ Question: "How prepared did you feel for taking on teacher leadership roles after completing your endorsement?" (N=61) Responses: "Very Prepared" (49.2%), "Mostly Prepared" (42.6%), "Somewhat Prepared" (8.2%), "Not at All Prepared" (0.0%). Results may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

¹⁰ Erika Hunt, Pam Reilly, and Audrey Soglin, "Teacher Leadership Report." Illinois' P-20 Teacher and Leadership Effectiveness Committee, p. 27. Retrieved August 3, 2018 from <https://education.illinoisstate.edu/downloads/csep/Wallace%20TL%20Report%20Layout%20FINAL.pdf>

¹¹ Question: "What role does the Teacher Leadership Endorsement play in your ability to take on additional roles in your school or district?" (N=61) Responses: "The endorsement is specifically required for one or more positions" (9.8%), "The endorsement makes me eligible for additional positions" (26.2%), "The endorsement is not required, but it improves my chances of being selected" (27.9%), "My school/district does not consider the endorsement in selecting candidates for leadership roles" (36.1%). Results may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

¹² Question: "Do you currently hold a teacher leadership or leadership position in your school or district? Please check all that apply." (Value/Percent/Responses) No (43%/26) Principal/Assistant Principal (10%/6) Building Level Administrator, Not Principal or Assistant Principal (7%/4) Teachers who indicated any leadership role (41%/25) Total (61) Of the teachers who indicated any leadership role, roles they indicated: (N=25, respondents could select multiple roles) Department Chair/Head (20%/5) Instructional Coach (12%/3) Mentor Teacher (28%/7) PLC Leader (32%/8) Other (28%/7)

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Question: "Would you recommend earning a Teacher Leadership Endorsement to others?" (N=61) Responses: "Yes" (85.2%), "No" (14.8%).

- ¹⁶ Professional Development. Retrieved August 8, 2018 from <http://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/TeachingAndLearning/EducatorEffectiveness/ProfessionalDevelopment/Pages/Home.aspx>
- ¹⁷ Kentucky Teacher Leadership Framework. (2015, December). Retrieved August 8, 2018 from <https://ctlonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Kentucky-Teacher-Leadership-Framework.pdf>
- ¹⁸ Washington State Fellows' Network. Retrieved August 8, 2018 from <https://www.k12.wa.us/educator-support/educator-leadership/washington-state-fellows-network>
- ¹⁹ Teacher Leadership and License Advancement: State Profile - Idaho. Retrieved August 8, 2018 from <http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/mbstcprofancw?rep=TLAST>
- ²⁰ Teacher Leader Guidebook. Retrieved August 8, 2018 from <https://www.tn.gov/education/teaching-in-tennessee/teacher-leader-guidebook.html>
- ²¹ DeMonte, Jenny "Micro-Credentials for Teachers, What Three Early Adopter States Have Learned So Far" American Institute for Research. Retrieved August 8, 2018 from <https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/downloads/report/Micro-Creditials-for-Teachers-September-2017.pdf>
- ²² Competency Based Micro-Credentials for Educators: Powerful Lessons from Two Years in the Field. Teaching Matters. Retrieved August 8, 2018 from <https://indd.adobe.com/view/77629392-c1f5-4bb7-aea2-995389297afc>
- ²³ TEAM (Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model). Tennessee Department of Education. Retrieved August 8, 2018 from <http://team-tn.org/professional-learning/micro-credentials/>
- ²⁴ Micro-credentials. Retrieved August 8, 2018 from <https://ilprincipals.org/grow/microcredentials/>
- ²⁵ Hunt, Reilly & Soglin, p. 27.