

INTRODUCTION

In Nevada and across the nation, recruitment of qualified professionals interested in pursuing teaching as a career does not meet the ever-increasing need for more teachers. There are many reasons for this. Classroom teachers leave the profession to realize greater career opportunities and/or to earn a more substantial salary. The teacher career pathway within our system is antiquated: Teacher or administrator are the only two steps that comprise the education career ladder. Although teacher leadership titles and opportunities exist, remuneration for additional leadership responsibilities is often limited. The term “teacher leadership” is dynamic and employed in a range of ways, resulting in additional responsibilities, but does not equate to additional compensation or actualized career advancement. Providing teacher leadership opportunities for educators is one way we can retain excellent teachers in the profession and in Clark County School District.

As Teach Plus Nevada Policy Fellows, current classroom teachers in CCSD, and teacher leaders, we wanted to research the current state of teacher leadership in Nevada and nationally in order to provide actionable recommendations that meet the needs of our district. In this paper, we offer four recommendations for improving pathways to teacher leadership in CCSD in order to impact school improvement and enhance students’ learning experiences.

1. Identify the ‘bright spots’ of teacher leadership in the Clark County School District to analyze teacher leadership success.
2. Establish a task force composed of stakeholders to design district-wide teacher leadership positions and develop recommendations for policy makers.
3. Develop career pathways for site-based teacher leadership positions.
4. Use existing salary schedule(s) for licensed personnel as a framework for developing remuneration for teacher leadership positions.

METHODOLOGY

Between October 2019 and March 2020, we reviewed research on successful teacher leadership models across our nation. We conducted teacher leadership readiness interviews with teacher leaders and administrators at seven schools within CCSD from November 2019 through January 2020. We assessed and analyzed the research literature gathered to inform our recommendations. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, we were unable to host our scheduled convening of teacher leaders, district leadership, and key stakeholders from the community to collect additional information and perspectives on teacher leadership.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

There is not a universally identified structure of leadership pathways for teachers in CCSD or within the state of Nevada. Although an administrative pipeline exists as an option for teacher leaders, there is a great need for tiered teacher leadership pathways. Many teachers, while seeking leadership opportunities, do not want to become administrators. Teacher leaders leave the classroom in pursuit of administrative positions or other career choices due to the lack of alternate leadership pathways for teachers—a key contributor to Nevada's desperate teacher shortage.¹

Because there is untapped leadership potential in the teaching force, options should exist to leverage the skills and talents of teacher leaders to impact school improvement and support student outcomes. As Katzenmeyer and Moller state, “[w]ithin every school there is a sleeping giant of teacher leadership, which can be a strong catalyst for making change.”² Teacher leaders can be employed to provide job-embedded professional development, peer mentoring, social emotional learning, facilitate restorative justice practices, cultivate family and community engagement, and effect change in their school communities. However, this can only happen if teacher leaders are given an opportunity to employ and enhance their current leadership talents as well as gain new leadership skills. Teacher leaders are exceptionally positioned to identify and implement innovative solutions to increase student achievement and close opportunity gaps for children of color and children living in low income communities. This is due in part to teacher leaders knowing what their specific school communities need and how to effectively respond to those needs.

Teacher leadership looks differently at each school site and is often left to the discretion of the administrative team to choose individuals as qualified candidates for leadership opportunities. However, there are no clear criteria to differentiate a teacher leader from a teacher simply willing to say “yes” to leadership responsibility. Asking teachers to assume greater responsibility or additional leadership duties without remuneration, support, or formal recognition often leads to teacher attrition. Ingersoll found that 56% of teachers leave [the profession] due to dissatisfaction.³ Given that there is no systematic model for tiered leadership pathways, many teachers become frustrated with the lack of support and the expectation of taking on [additional] duties outside their contracted responsibilities. Frustrated educators often burn out and sometimes leave the profession entirely, ultimately impacting students' equitable access to highly effective teachers.

“I feel like it's hard for teacher leaders to sustain - because there is not enough compensation. We are good at what we do, we step up, and yet there is nothing to show for it. We get burnt out. I personally do not want to be in [administration]. I also [advise] student council, which I also love, but it is a lot. I have had to give up things in the past just because it was not sustainable.” ~CCSD teacher

“The solutions to our most challenging issues will come from our teacher leaders; teacher leaders are the solution.” ~CCSD administrator

TEACHER LEADERSHIP MODELS

In addition to the lack of systematic teacher leadership pathway models, defining teacher leadership is difficult because existing models are individualized to specific school settings and vary greatly from state to state. However, varied the definitions of teacher leadership, there is consensus that teacher leaders improve learning beyond their classroom as instructional experts that support colleagues through change. Often, this growing opportunity to support overall school improvement leads to, "career advancement opportunities to improve job satisfaction and the professionalization of teaching."⁴ Research highlights several successful teacher leadership models across the country (Appendix A) that are impacting school improvement and leading to career advancement.

Additionally, in order to address the needs of diverse student populations, schools and districts must have the flexibility to build hybrid teaching roles, site-specific instructional leadership roles, and district/state based teacher leadership roles. Teachers United defines a hybrid teacher leader as "an effective teacher leader who spends 40-60% of their contracted time in the classroom teaching students, while also performing clearly defined roles that measurably impact student and colleague growth, development, and success."⁵

In the following narratives, teachers describe serving in teacher leadership positions that capture the hybrid teaching roles in CCSD.

Hybrid Teacher/Strategist

Terri Romaniello, hybrid math teacher and strategist at Faiss Middle School, advocated for her current position realizing her school's need to improve overall student math achievement. Romaniello has a modified class schedule, holds before and after school tutoring sessions for students who require additional math support, and works with individual students throughout the day through push-in (in classroom student support) and pull-out services for diverse classrooms. In addition to teaching part-time, Romaniello leads and serves teachers as they work to improve their instructional skills; thus, Romaniello's content and pedagogical expertise reaches a larger number of students. Furthermore, the flexibility of her teaching and leadership role allows her to meet administrative needs that directly impact student learning such as master schedule development, data analysis, assessment administration, and school level transition collaboration.

"I can see myself staying in education in this type of position where I get to keep one foot in the classroom but have the opportunity to do so much more. I love teaching math, [and] after 23 years, it's nice to be able to move into a position such as mine knowing that I can once again enjoy coming to work and making even more of a difference." ~Terri Romaniello, Faiss Middle School

Site specific instructional leadership roles permit schools to directly impact all students' learning needs and achievement and supports classroom teachers by removing additional responsibilities not directly tied to instruction. Schools can meet students' specific and specialized needs and teaching and learning challenges in this manner.

ELL Facilitator/Instructional Coach

Brad Evans, the ELL facilitator and instructional coach at Valley High School, is a strong example of a current teacher leader making significant impact within his school community and most specifically for the school's emerging bilingual/English language learner (ELL) population. Evans' position initially began as a hybrid role. However, as the need to support students who were English language learners and that of their teachers grew due to shifting student demographics, Evans and his administration responded to the school's needs and transitioned his position from hybrid teacher to a full-time ELL strategist. Evans now supports over 800 English language learners and their teachers as well as their counselors who guide crucial scheduling and post-secondary decision-making. Evans' student-centered leadership is evidence that teacher leaders effectively support a larger number of students and teachers, while significantly improving school-wide academic achievement.

Regional Math Trainer

Jen Loescher, a regional math trainer with Southern Nevada Regional Professional Development Program (RPDP) is yet another example of an effective teacher leadership model. Loescher leads and serves students and teachers across five counties including Clark County School District and state charter schools. In leading macro level professional learning, Loescher serves in a position of teacher leadership whereby her content expertise and instructional effectiveness create scalable support for teaching colleagues and advances student learning outcomes. The employment of this type of instructional leadership and coaching across geographical and district boundaries serves to inform improved teacher and student support and foster innovative methods for advancing teacher leadership.

"This role has continued to re-energize my commitment to teaching - it has helped me find more ways for my efficacy tank to be filled daily. This position has given me an opportunity to scale protocols and professional learning that I established at one school site to other sites." ~Jen Loescher, Regional Math Trainer with Southern Nevada Regional Professional Development Program

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Identify the 'bright spots' of teacher leadership in clark county school district to analyze success.

In consideration of the design and establishment of a framework for effective teacher leadership in CCSD, we recommend that district leadership identify district personnel to conduct a district-wide survey of teacher leadership to identify the bright spots among the 360 schools in Clark County. Heath and Heath suggest that an effective method of generating meaningful, lasting change is to analyze success and replicate it.⁶ This process is referred to as finding the bright spots. CCSD has a diversity of models of effective teacher leadership. Some teacher leadership roles are hybrid teaching/coaching roles while others are full-time instructional coaches or learning strategists; some teacher leadership roles are centrally-based while still others are site-based. Such a survey should gather information from diverse contexts, such as the central office, Regional Professional Development Program (RPDP), site-based administration, site- and district-based learning strategists, instructional coaches,

and teachers. A survey should require consideration of respondents' contexts and roles, identification of teacher leadership positions, teacher leadership successes and challenges, and compensation. We recommend three broad categories to identify teacher leadership positions: central-office based positions (e.g. project facilitators and RPDP), site-based hybrid positions (e.g. modified/combined teaching and leading roles), and site-based full-time positions (e.g. learning strategists and instructional coaches designated to support faculty and students). Finding such 'bright spots' are a first step in effectively leveraging teacher leaders to impact school climate, student learning and achievement, and teacher recruitment and retention.

2. Establish a task force to design district-wide teacher leadership positions and develop recommendations for policy makers.

We recommend that the district create a task force to formalize a framework for teacher leadership positions; this is a complex task that entails diverse engagement from a variety of stakeholders. Intentionally enlisting a diverse representation of stakeholders (teacher leaders, central office administrators, site leadership, students, families, community members, teacher associations, and state leadership) will assist in mitigating unintended consequences and result in a more developed, practicable framework. Furthermore, there are many examples of teacher leadership benefiting student achievement in the CCSD (e.g. RPDP and site-based hybrid roles). Incorporating teacher leadership ideas from these successful implementations may prove to be invaluable. The recommended survey could be designed by the proposed committee or task force on teacher leadership design; and the survey data could serve to inform the preliminary work of the teacher leadership committee or task force.

3. Develop career pathways for site-based teacher leadership positions.

Although CCSD currently has examples for leveraging teacher leadership, there is not a universal, sustainable career pathway for teachers to advance their careers without leaving the classroom. Some teachers leave school sites to serve as leaders within the Curriculum Professional Development (CPD) and Regional Professional Development Program (RPDP). Others stay in school sites as learning strategists or instructional coaches, but there are not currently district-wide guidelines for these teacher leadership positions. The existing framework of leadership within CPD and RPDP is formalized and established with clear outcomes of student achievement. This framework, however, does not provide leadership options for teachers who want to remain assigned to a school site. Maintaining teachers' connections to the classroom while creating spaces for them to be leaders at their respective sites is a widely recognized need that currently remains unmet.

Developing a teacher leadership framework for selecting, training, and compensating teacher leaders, such as learning strategists or instructional coaches, would strengthen the district's implementation of teacher leadership and more effectively leverage teacher leadership to impact school improvement and support students. Such a framework would serve to provide needed guidance to school administrators committed to leveraging teacher leadership and extending teachers an option to advance their careers without leaving the classroom. Instituting career pathways for teachers to grow and advance in their careers as teachers will assist CCSD in addressing school climate, impacting student learning and achievement, and addressing teacher shortages by bolstering teacher recruitment and retention.

4. Use existing salary schedule(s) for licensed personnel as a framework for remuneration for teacher leadership.

Career advancement typically implies commensurate remuneration, often determined by one's education, expertise, and experience. Recruiting and retaining quality teachers necessitates a clearly articulated means to provide and advance salary compensation within an established salary schedule. Many school districts use a "steps and columns" salary schedule for licensed teaching personnel. The Professional Growth System (PGS) framework in CCSD is the means for teachers to advance salary columns. The PGS is scheduled to be renegotiated with the local bargaining organization for the 2021-2022 school year.

During this reevaluation of the PGS, we recommend consideration and incorporation of, but not limited to, teacher leadership roles that would correlate to column advancement for compensation of additional teacher leadership responsibilities. While making specific recommendations for this process extends beyond the scope of this document, we recommend that teacher leadership positions be compensated in a manner that reflects advanced leadership responsibilities. Such a compensation framework may include additional contract days, extended duty days, voluntary buyouts of teacher curriculum preparation and plan time, paid professional development, or other additional incentives. We recommend that a proposed compensation framework provides clarity, uniformity, and equitable compensation for teacher leadership roles throughout the district. Nittler, Ross, and Selig-Addiss found that 35 of the 50 states and the District of Columbia have a formal statewide teacher leadership policy.⁷ Partelow echoes this recommendation noting, "Nevada should follow the lead of other states that have enacted statewide teacher career pathways" and citing specific pathways established in Iowa, Arizona, Delaware, and Missouri.⁸

COVID-19 PANDEMIC CONSIDERATIONS

As the COVID-19 crisis unfolded in Nevada, we stepped immediately into our agency as teacher leaders, teaching and leading from the classrooms – and from home. This work is an example of teacher leadership in action. Recognizing that distance learning was imminent, we initiated collaborative partnerships among teaching peers and community leaders to address the most critical needs of their students and families. Teaching and leading within the most vulnerable communities in Southern Nevada, we are orchestrating and engaging in the following teacher leadership actions:

- + Expanding of classroom food pantries to immediately assist 400 families with concerns of food insecurity
- + Designing and establishing an online resource community to address needs of students and families in the Las Vegas Valley; most specifically securing food and personal items
- + Advocating for additional food distribution sites in CCSD within communities of high need; resulting in the designation of additional food distribution sites and modified requirements that consider the vulnerability of families

- + Hosting family meetings via digital platforms to address needs of families instantaneously becoming co-teachers of their students; delivering donated school and personal supplies to families' homes (and those purchased with personal funds); maintaining, ongoing engagement with families to address physical, social-emotional, and academic concerns of students and family members
- + Advocating for and assisting in securing technology devices and internet access for students and families
- + Initiating and engaging in problem-solving discussions with Nevada State Board of Education members; as well as engaging with State Superintendent Jhone Ebert and Deputy Superintendent Felicia Gonzales

The critical need for teacher leadership is evidenced by the committed role that Nevada teacher leaders played and continue to play in navigating and mitigating the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and in consideration of the reopening of schools for the new school year. The Teaching Policy Fellows have worked together to address equity issues made more visible by the crisis – and continue to teach, lead, and problem-solve to address the hardships caused by COVID-19. The initiative taken by teacher leaders, employing crisis response protocol, is indicative of the manner in which teacher leadership can be leveraged to address educational challenges in Nevada.

CONCLUSION

We can maximize student achievement by integrating teacher leadership into the district's plan to analyze successful teacher leadership in our district; engaging key district stakeholders to develop systemic teacher leadership positions and career pathways; and utilizing the existing salary schedule to structurally acknowledge and honor the efforts and expertise of our teacher leaders' work with students and colleagues, particularly as we return to school in the face of great uncertainty. These recommendations for teacher leadership in Nevada will facilitate the professionalization of teaching, the opportunity for career advancement, and the success of teaching and learning.

APPENDIX A

SUCCESSFUL TEACHER LEADERSHIP MODELS

Natale, C., Gaddis, L., Bassett, K., & McKnight, K. (2013) examined teacher leadership models nationwide and found four to be the most promising. A brief description of these programs is below.

Arizona Career Ladder

Although state funding was fully phased out in 2015, the initiative led to “higher levels of student achievement in career ladder schools through performance-based compensation plans that allowed teachers to advance careers without leaving the classroom (Natale et al., 2013, p.33). Individual districts found initiative to have such a positive impact and have been using local and external grants to sustain the model (Natale et al., 2013, p.33).

TAP System (TAP™)

Consists of four key elements of support which includes:

Multiple Career Paths: Teachers can serve a master and mentor teacher for additional compensation and form a leadership team (Natale et al., 2013, p.35).

The TAP system was found to increase consistent rates of student achievement, retention of highly effective teachers, and teacher’s quality of instruction over time (Natale et al., 2013, p.35).

Public Impact “Opportunity Culture” Initiative

Includes “neo-differentiated staffing models” and “tiered pay-and career structures” so that every student has an effective teacher “multi-classroom leadership” (Natale et al., 2013, p.37). Models provide career advancement and increased pay funded “sustainably rather than with grants” (Natale et al., 2013, p.36). In this model, newer teachers work with expert teachers to co-plan and co-teach.

DC Leadership Initiative for Teachers (LIFT)

A five-stage career ladder that “provides high-performing teachers with opportunities” to advance while remaining in the classroom with “additional responsibilities and increased recognition and compensation” (Natale et al., 2013, p.38).

ENDNOTES

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⁸ See endnote 1

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