

# CLIMBING THE TEACHER CAREER LADDER

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Teachers Reflect on Indiana's HEA1008 (2019)  
Pilot Teacher Leadership Programs





## AUTHORS: 2022-23 POLICY FELLOWS

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## INTRODUCTION

Our nation's schools continue to struggle to find qualified teachers to lead our classrooms. In 2019, the Indiana legislature strengthened the Hoosier teacher pipeline by passing two key bills. House Enrolled Act (HEA) 1009 (2019) created a pilot grant program for teacher residency programs that strengthen the pre-service experiences for new teachers entering Indiana classrooms.<sup>1</sup> HEA 1008 (2019) focused on supporting teachers who were already in the classroom and established a pilot grant program to support districts in implementing or planning to integrate teacher career ladders.<sup>2</sup>

As a result of this legislation, 21 local education agencies (LEAs) across Indiana were awarded funds through a competitive process.<sup>3</sup> Eighteen of these LEAs received funds to implement career ladders directly and three LEAs received funds to support the planning and eventual implementation of a teacher career ladder pilot. Career ladders refer to a structure within a school or district that creates levels of professional advancement and growth available to teacher leaders. This structure provides a framework for educators to progress in their careers by acquiring new skills, knowledge, and responsibilities without necessarily becoming administrators. When implemented well, career ladder programs and models have been shown to help retain educators in the profession. In addition, through leadership models like this, teacher leaders provide valuable guidance to their colleagues and the school at large—both veteran and new—in the form of coaching, curriculum building, and support.

House Bill 1008 required that LEAs applying for funding must implement one of four career ladder models:

- + The System for Teacher and Student Advancement (TAP) teacher performance model which is run by National Institute for Excellence in Teaching
- + The Opportunity Culture teacher performance model created by Public Impact
- + A model teacher performance program approved by a national school employee organization, or
- + A locally created teacher performance model program

Any locally created teacher performance model program had to include the following, and grant recipients had three years to use the dollars:

- + Comprehensive pay progression for teacher ladders
- + Quality teacher assessment system
- + Pay system that supports early educators
- + Connection to high-quality professional development
- + Pay system with competitive base pay, and
- + Plan for how student achievement will be improved

As classroom teachers and Teach Plus Policy Fellows, we wanted to better understand the impact of career ladders on teacher retention, school culture, and student performance. We wanted to know what has worked well and what could be done more effectively. In this brief, we outline findings from our research and recommendations for policymakers on how to improve career ladder opportunities for Indiana's educators.

## Findings

1. Regardless of the career ladder model, teachers benefited from additional support, mentorship, and collaboration.
2. Teachers see a clear connection between improved school culture and improved student outcomes.
3. Teachers are optimistic about the potential impact of teacher leadership models but want more time and resources to fully leverage the programs' potential.
4. Teachers want more transparency and communication when it comes to career ladders' opportunities in their school buildings.

## Recommendations

1. District leaders statewide should consider integrating teacher career ladders into their locally created compensation models, rather than as add-on programs.
2. When implementing teacher career ladders, school administrators should clearly define the program and communicate transparently about teachers' roles and the program's expectations.
3. The Indiana state legislature should establish a sustained funding source to create incentives for districts looking to plan and implement innovative programs such as grow-your-own, residencies, and career ladders to support educator pipelines.
4. The Indiana Department of Education should provide guidance and track progress and performance of programs across the state, compiling case studies as examples of effective implementation for schools and districts.

## METHODOLOGY

To better understand the impact of the teacher career ladder models on teacher retention, school culture, and student performance, we partnered with the Department of Education to host a series of virtual focus groups with Indiana's educators. The teachers' insights, in conjunction with the LEA's quantitative data, provide a holistic picture of the programs' implementation, impact, and lessons learned over the course of the grant period.

We invited teachers from the 21 LEAs to take part in the focus groups. Educators then signed up to participate virtually in conversations with mixed groups of peers from across the state. Over the course of 17 virtual focus groups, we collected feedback from 71 educators representing 16 of the 21 LEAs who received funding. Each 75-minute focus group was moderated by a pair of teachers trained to facilitate and analyze the collected data. All focus groups were conducted live via video-conferencing. None of the videos were recorded to ensure candid conversations.

A large portion of the teachers we spoke with taught at the elementary level and over half of respondents taught in Title I schools. The majority of the teachers had at least 10 years of teaching experience, had been trained through a traditional undergraduate program, and identified as White.

## FINDINGS

### 1. Regardless of the career ladder model, teachers benefited from additional support, mentorship, and collaboration.

Focus group participants emphasized the positive impact of additional support, mentorship, and collaboration that was part of their individual and collective school experiences, and appreciated the professional development they received as a result of participating in their district's pilot program.

In the focus groups, teachers repeatedly noted a stronger school culture because of the career ladders and leadership roles implemented in their schools. The largest specific shift in school culture was in the way teachers in this program interacted with each other more often and more collaboratively. According to a veteran IPS teacher, *"We have seen positive shifts in our culture. Many teachers comment on how they get support and guidance in any area that they need support."*<sup>4</sup> Another IPS teacher also shared, going on to say, *"[T]here have been positive shifts in our school culture. Teachers, especially new teachers, appreciate the support with planning and lesson internalization as well as the opportunities for partner teaching and modeling provided."*<sup>5</sup>

Career ladder opportunities also led to noticeable improvements in morale. An Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation (EVSC) math teacher shared: *"The implementation of the teacher career ladder has impacted our staff by helping create a more unified staff, building a team atmosphere that is positive, and willing to try new instructional strategies."*<sup>6</sup> Another educator from Nettle Creek highlighted, *"[W]e are on our way there. Trying to move from a culture of being a 'classroom' teacher to a 'school' teacher, where we all are united and share the same goal and vision. Everyone plays a role, no matter which grade level or content area."*<sup>7</sup> One 3rd grade teacher from Lawrence said it especially well, *"Teachers are more collaborative. It has made it more enjoyable because there is so much support when you are struggling with something."*<sup>8</sup>

It is important to note that a few of the respondents shared that while there were burgeoning positive shifts in culture, the shift was not complete after three years. A Martinsville math teacher shared: *"I feel that we are just getting started on the Teacher Career Ladder. So it is tough to see a change already in school culture,"*<sup>9</sup> and another Martinsville-based teacher agreed, saying, *"We have raised awareness to where we would like to see from teachers, but I don't think we have seen a major culture shift yet. I'm hoping that by continuing the program we will begin to see a culture shift in the next couple of years."*<sup>10</sup>

Educators in our focus groups shared that the program was especially beneficial for new teachers, with an educator from Warsaw saying, *"Our new teachers know where to go for help. It has also helped new teachers have a natural road into experienced teachers' classrooms to learn. Comments have been that teachers are happy to hear what they*

are doing well and should continue to be intentional about doing in their classroom. This is unusual in an evaluation.”<sup>11</sup> Layers of support for all educators—especially new ones—lead to many desired outcomes within a school. This work also helps re-ground our more experienced teachers and help them grow, with another veteran Warsaw educator saying, “The implementation of this program has only been positive. When I have visited classrooms or had other teachers visit my classroom, the students benefit greatly. I am able to reflect on my teaching and their learning ... I get feedback that encourages me to continue teaching certain lessons as I have been. Other times I see something I love from a teammate and implement it into my classroom!”<sup>12</sup>

## 2. Teachers see a clear connection between improved school culture and improved student outcomes.

Teachers felt the improved collaboration amongst their staff, because of career ladders, resulted in increased focus on student instruction and more productive and unified data discussions positively benefiting student outcomes.

Teachers in our focus groups observed a connection between improved school culture and improved student performance. “We have shared investments in our students and their achievement and we as a school have the same vision,”<sup>13</sup> a veteran elementary school teacher in IPS shared. Another veteran teacher from Muncie agreed, saying, “Staff feels more supported and it shows in the culture of the building. It has created a more supportive environment which benefits the students.”<sup>14</sup> A Nettle Creek teacher synthesized the positive impacts that the career ladder teacher leadership program had on teacher effectiveness leading to student growth in their setting when they said, “Our school is focused on instruction and student achievement at a level that I have never seen in 28 years. Teachers are focused on providing best practice instruction, support is consistently provided to ALL teachers (certified and non-certified), and data is being analyzed at all grade levels in an effort to improve instruction.”<sup>15</sup>

In addition, many respondents reported a perceived positive change in pedagogy or practice within their school or district as a result of career ladders and are optimistic about the potential to improve student outcomes over time. A master teacher in Nettle Creek shared, “There have been tangible changes to our district’s practice and pedagogy. Teachers are collaborating on best practices and utilizing them within their lessons. Student work has been huge in analyzing what students are and are not understanding within each content area. Our goal is to bring student work each week to our cluster groups.”<sup>16</sup> Another Nettle Creek educator shared, “The tangible changes are growing and developing collectively within the district by receiving weekly professional development from our very own teacher leaders. We have also had the opportunity to work with other districts that are curious and intrigued by our model.”<sup>17</sup>

Teachers continued to emphasize the connection between well-trained and supported teachers and student outcomes with a 4th grade Lawrence teacher saying, “When teacher leaders are trained and are able to spread the knowledge across the building and support, coach, and guide teachers and the implementation, all this affects instruction positively.”<sup>18</sup> Another educator from Michigan City shared the same: “The teacher leader program has allowed us to take a deeper look at data and outcomes. We are able to bring thoughts based on data to teams, who can improve instructional planning and implementation.”<sup>19</sup>

### 3. Teachers are optimistic about the potential impact of teacher leadership models but want more time and resources to fully leverage the programs' potential.

Teachers felt optimistic about the implementation of the teacher leadership programs and the impact they potentially have on school culture, teacher retention, and student outcomes and want more resources and protected time for the programs' implementation and development.

When we asked if teacher retention had been impacted in their schools by the career ladders, teachers' responses were all over the board—with one Muncie teacher sharing positive impacts, *“teachers feel more support and are more willing to stay because they feel that support.”*<sup>20</sup> An IPS teacher spoke of their own positive experience *“The teacher leader role that I am currently in, is a big factor in my decision to stay at my school. I love the opportunity to work alongside teachers and colleagues in my school and district.”*<sup>21</sup> But some teachers felt there had been no impact and others felt unsure or more frustrated with the system at large, one EVSC teacher shared, *“Teachers are at their capacity with all the policies, expectations, and student needs that encouraging their growth in leadership will not solve the problem of retaining highly effective teachers. Something has to give for teachers to remain doing this important work.”*<sup>22</sup>

Yet while retention over the course of the pilot was somewhat inconclusive, in part due to the COVID-19 outbreak, when we asked teachers if the potential of moving into a teacher leader role would be appealing in helping them consider staying in their school or the profession, the majority of the teachers we spoke with felt it was very important. A Warsaw ELA teacher shared, *“The benefits of this program are significant. It allows me to stay in the classroom, which is what I love to do. I have no interest in becoming an administrator, but that does not mean that I don't want to continue to learn. I am able to grow my practice by having other teachers observe me and by observing them.”*<sup>23</sup> Another teacher from Evansville shared the benefit for all teachers, *“I believe that by even having the option/opportunity to step into a leadership role, teachers feel more valued, heard, and respected. I also think it greatly refreshes teachers, allowing them to take a new perspective, better themselves as educators, and have the potential to better the lives of others around them.”*<sup>24</sup> Finally, a Nettle Creek teacher shared that, *“Our district is demonstrating support that teachers in this area know they cannot get elsewhere. As a result, teachers are prepared to stay and invest in our district.”*<sup>25</sup> All of these insights tell us the importance of programs like teacher career ladders and the professional growth teachers desire.

When asked about extending the career ladder programs in their LEAs, teachers again had various answers. Many felt that the pilot in their school was successful and would like to see their program expanded. One Muncie veteran teacher requested, *“I would like for my school to work towards offering teacher mentoring for all subject areas.”*<sup>26</sup> Another teacher from Mishawaka wrote, *“Have a teacher leader for each grade level in the corporation. Give those teacher leaders time built into their day to be available to help others.”*<sup>27</sup> This response recognized the benefit of expanding the program, but also another need: time.

Teaching is a demanding job, and many educators felt that more protected time was needed for many of the roles. An IPS teacher leader shared this recommendation, *“It would be good to give leaders more time to plan and attend PD to add more tools to their toolbox and offer more ways to support teachers and the school.”*<sup>28</sup> In addition

to time, focus group participants emphasized a need to train mentor teachers in how to effectively support and help those they are mentoring. *"I would recommend that the schools do something across the district to help develop the mentor teachers. Many were given the mentor teacher role, but have not actively embraced it,"*<sup>29</sup> shared a Title I teacher from Warsaw. Finally, many participants recognized the demanding role of teacher leadership. As one Michigan City educator put it, *"I would recommend greater compensation, due to the fact these roles take many additional hours to prepare for, which is difficult on top of teaching."*<sup>30</sup> Many pilot programs were successful, but more resources are needed to increase their impact. For struggling programs, more resources or better alignment would help.

*"I feel that the mentor teachers need more time during the school day to assist their fellow teachers. There needs to be someone hired to cover their rooms on a consistent basis, so the teacher feels comfortable stepping out of her room to mentor as learning still occurs in her classroom."*—**Veteran elementary school teacher in Muncie.**<sup>31</sup>

With the COVID-19 pandemic interrupting implementation one year into the grant period, many schools were delayed in rolling career ladder programs out and had to adjust their plans accordingly. Even so, teachers felt optimistic about what could be accomplished should these programs continue, with many schools already working toward plans for continuation. Yet a need for more funding and support continues with one high school math teacher making this point, saying, *"I ... think that grant money and state funding will ... play a role in the process. So please be generous with the funding!"*<sup>32</sup> Another teacher from Monroe County emphasized, *"We don't have any funding so not sure how we are going to continue moving forward, but we hope we are able to develop the funding."*<sup>33</sup> This was true across all levels of schools that implemented a teacher career ladder with an elementary teacher saying, *"I believe they [district admin] want to, but I think the grant money has run out. I hope they can find a way to continue to pay the teacher leaders because it does take a lot of time and energy to implement effectively."*<sup>34</sup>

#### **4. Teachers want more transparency and communication when it comes to career ladders' opportunities in their school buildings.**

Across all models of teacher leadership, teachers highlighted the need for more communication around the programs' launch and implementation, as well as more transparency and greater clarity around roles, expectations, support structures, and selection processes for those participating in their local teacher leadership models.

In the focus groups we hosted, teachers from across a variety of models participated in the collective conversation. Because districts had discretion over the model they were able to choose, we found that our cross-district dialogue surfaced wide variation across the models implemented. And while teachers felt their districts should have control of their model, we also heard from our focus group participants that there is a need for more continuity and consistency when it comes to the roles and expectations of the career ladder programs at large. *"I would suggest being more clear about our exact jobs, goals, and expectations for us within this role. There was a lot... 'left up to interpretation,' which sometimes works, but it's also good to know exactly what I'm expected to do and how I can be successful in my position."*<sup>35</sup> shared a Martinsville

teacher. Another teacher from Nettle Creek emphasized the need for objective selection processes to choose qualified teacher leaders. *"I would recommend they come up with an unbiased system of choosing those leaders. I would also suggest they clearly define the role expectations and have the leaders attend professional development that pertains to their role."*<sup>36</sup>

Teachers in the focus groups also voiced frustration when the program they were involved in was not implemented with fidelity or when teachers weren't compensated for their time and energy. Some teachers felt their district had not implemented a true career ladder, with an elementary teacher from Southwest Indiana saying, *"Because what was implemented [in my district] was not a true career ladder framework, the result was also not in alignment with the impact that those career ladders are expected to have."*<sup>37</sup> In addition, the legislation that established this pilot program included funds for teachers' stipends, yet some of the teachers we spoke with shared that they didn't receive stipends as intended. A Title I teacher from northern Indiana shared, *"It is frustrating that the school districts are getting funds towards this pilot program, however as a teacher in multiple roles that are a direct result of this program, I am not compensated for any of the roles that I have taken on."*<sup>38</sup> Another educator from Central Indiana, shared *"I do feel as though there needs to be compensation for teachers who take on these roles, due to the high amount of work that goes into it."*<sup>39</sup> Other programs only implemented programs for certain subjects rather than full grades. A Warsaw teacher shared, *"For maximum impact, it would be awesome to see a systematic approach implemented."*<sup>40</sup>

Participants believe that more efforts need to be made when it comes to sharing information across the state about the program, which will help further the conversation around career ladder programs at large as a strategy for improving culture, teacher retention, and student outcomes in districts across the state. Educators' familiarity with the career ladder program often depended on their role in the LEA's program. When asked if they were familiar with the teacher career ladder implemented in their district or network, teachers' responses were all over the board. Only half were very familiar or somewhat familiar with the program, but there were a number who had not heard the term "career ladder" previously. So while they were familiar with the program they had participated in, the verbiage posed a challenge in creating common dialogue across the districts. Here is how an elementary teacher explained it, *"This is the first time I am hearing the term Teacher Career Ladders, but our district has done a lot to help improve instructional practices and build teacher leadership."*<sup>41</sup>

For example, one IPS respondent wrote, *"I have had the opportunity to lead under the Teacher Career Ladder role. IPS calls this role "Opportunity Culture" and depending on the need the coach is assigned an MCL1, 2, or 3 position ... I have studied the ... Framework and have supported interviewing for the role in our district as well."*<sup>42</sup> This participant has deep knowledge of the program implemented in the LEA and was in a leadership position. However, another teacher in Warsaw wrote, *"I am newer to the profession of teaching ... I feel like the concept of Teacher Career Ladders could and should be explained more to teachers, especially those new to the profession."*<sup>43</sup> This newer teacher did not have a lot of knowledge of the career ladder program and felt that there should be more communication about it. While those with leadership positions within the career ladders naturally know more about the programs, all staff need a clear understanding of the program, its vision, and the benefits it provides in building more efficient and effective classrooms.



Teachers who work in districts that formally partnered with the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) were especially positive about the impact of the programs, with one Martinsville teacher sharing, *“Our district has been hugely impacted by the implementation of the teacher leader role and our work with NIET. We’ve done PLCs for several years, but they never really brought about much change. This year, that has changed. Our principals and teacher leaders have worked alongside NIET and have made our PLCs so amazing. I have learned so much this year and I feel that I have been able to help others as well.”*<sup>44</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Districts statewide should consider integrating teacher career ladders into their locally created compensation models, rather than as add-on programs.

Rather than use stipends as add-ons for the duties of teachers, district leaders should consider hiring for explicit positions with allocated time for coaching, clear roles and responsibilities, and explicit pay levels integrated into the culture and climate of the school.

### 2. When implementing teacher career ladders, school administrators should clearly define the program and communicate transparently about teachers’ roles and the program’s expectations.

District leaders should create and protect time for teacher leaders to participate in development opportunities and training to be effective as well as coach the teachers they are supporting. One participant commented, *“I believe mentor teachers need more time to be able to mentor. When I took this role, I stepped out of a classroom and into an interventionist position, it was perfect because I was able to spend a few minutes of my day seeing the other classrooms and helping when necessary. Then, a teacher quit in November and I had to step back into the classroom. My mentoring availability has decreased drastically and I am often unable to make it to other teachers’ classrooms. There needs to be more time built in for mentor teachers to be able to mentor in other classrooms.”*<sup>45</sup> Without established time for teacher leaders to accomplish the goals of career ladders, the program suffers.

### 3. The Indiana state legislature should establish a sustained funding source to create incentives for districts looking to plan and implement innovative programs such as grow-your-own, residencies, and career ladders to support educator pipelines.

Currently, districts in Indiana have opportunities to apply for grants to fund their programs to help their local educator pipelines. However, funding is often available only for a short period of time and does not support sustainable change. Shifting funding from grants and pilots to district incentives expands proven programs to new sites as well as makes it possible to sustain successful programs in districts.

Expanded investment in high-quality training experiences will help to authentically prepare teachers for the classrooms where they are needed most and provide opportunities for current educators to advance their careers without leaving the classroom or moving into administration.

**4. The Indiana Department of Education should provide guidance and track progress and performance of programs across the state, compiling case studies as examples of effective implementation for schools and districts.**

To help legislators, educators, and constituents understand the impact of career ladders, the Indiana Department of Education should create a website as a repository for information about career ladders. The website should include a simple glossary of definitions, a collection of job descriptions for the roles that could exist within a career ladder, and research on the impact of career ladders. With this information, districts can make and communicate informed decisions to their stakeholders. Bringing clarity around this program overall and the roles involved helps more people — both educators and those who support education — take more ownership to support the process within their local schools.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout our research, we found that teacher career ladders and teacher leadership models can act as a catalyst for positive change within our schools and districts. Teachers who feel invested in and cared for tend to want to stay where they are, resulting in consistent teams dedicated to collaboration. The ability to have focused conversations about instruction and student data creates better environments for student learning, and the overall school culture benefits when teachers are able to be coached and connect. Building upon this pilot and the lessons learned, it is imperative that we continue to forge a path forward to create incentives for districts to innovate and implement, listening to practitioners along the way. As we continue to grapple with the teacher shortage, we encourage state, district, and school leaders to continue to support research-based solutions like career ladders with these pilots being clear proof points for how our state can keep moving forward.

# PERSPECTIVES ON INDIANA TEACHER CAREER LADDERS:

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## Insights from Administrators Partnered With National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET)

NIET convened their Indiana Educators Advisory Board (IN EAB) on Friday, March 24, 2023 for a roundtable discussion on the impact of teacher career ladders. The roundtable discussion focused on leader perspectives on Indiana's teacher career ladder initiatives at-large and the implementation of teacher leadership in Indiana. Leaders were asked about their experience with the initiative from teacher, school, and district leader perspectives. Overall, administrators' perspectives aligned with what we heard from teachers in our focus groups.

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### **1** **Regardless of the career ladder model, teachers benefited from additional support, mentorship, and collaboration:**

Focus group participants emphasized the positive impact of additional support, mentorship, and collaboration that was part of their individual and collective school experiences, and appreciated the professional development they received as a result of participating in their district's pilot program.

***"This grant has created the structures and space for us to develop our teachers. We are using Title II funds to maintain our teacher leadership roles. We have a new principal and having teacher leaders by their side has been a game changer. It creates a solid unit and better connections with classroom teachers. We achieved our growth goals. We will attract more students and that creates momentum."***

**—Jenny Oakley, Director of eLearning and Literacy, MSD Marstinville**

***"We recruit and sell our school by talking about the support and coaching a teacher will receive ... we have to invest in them and show them we value them, and we value their growth. We model that right from the start in the interview or in our presentations to aspiring teachers during college visits."***

**—Stephanie Cotter, Principal of Central Elementary, Beech Grove City Schools**

## **2** Teachers see the clear connection between improved school culture and improved student outcomes:

Teachers felt the improved collaboration amongst their staff, because of career ladders, resulted in an increased focus on student instruction and more productive and unified data discussions positively benefiting student outcome.

*“Our school goal is based on math. The career ladder structure has brought our K-2 teachers a lot of ownership through the activities that we have done. We are seeing huge growth in our NWEA scores. 90% of 3rd-grade students met or were above – huge growth in third grade.”*

—Tiffani Hokey, Principal of Hagerstown Elementary, Nettle Creek Schools

*“For me, one of the biggest impacts is when teachers embrace their student data. One of my most amazing teachers – when we would talk about NWEA data she would groan and resist. This year for the first time she was excited to see the results and very focused on data. Students showed huge growth in math goals. She no longer sees it as just filling out a form. She has a plan for how to use the data.”*

—Jenny Oakley, Director of eLearning and Literacy, MSD Martinsville

*“Teacher leadership roles have allowed the principals to thoughtfully model and delegate shared responsibilities and ownership for systems that support the improvement of the school. As a result of understanding the system, principals can better leverage the structures for support while growing professionals both inside and outside the classroom.”*

—Whitney Wilkowski, Director of Professional Development, Perry Township Schools

## **3** Teachers are optimistic about the potential impact of teacher leadership models but want more time and resources to fully leverage the programs' potential:

Teachers felt optimistic about the implementation of the teacher leadership programs and the impact they potentially have on school culture, teacher retention, and student outcomes and want more resources and protected time for the programs' implementation and development.

*“As a principal, I have never had the time to give new teachers the support they needed. I didn't have the structures to give them that support. Now, as a result of having a structure of teacher leaders as part of the building instructional leadership team, we are accelerating the learning for new teachers. All of them are presenting now as more experienced teachers.”*

—Stephanie Cotter, Principal of Central Elementary, Beech Grove City Schools

*“I came to Whitko because they were starting the TAP process. I wanted to be part of that growth process because I had been a part of it in my prior district. I have been a career teacher, a mentor teacher, I have been a master, and now an administrator. I have seen the growth of staff along the way. I have seen teachers bounce back and forth between teacher leadership roles. Every member of my first school Instructional Leadership Team is either a school administrator or master teacher or district-level administrator now.”*

—Shanon Layne, Principal of Pierceton Elementary, Whitko Community Schools

## **4 Teachers want more transparency and communication when it comes to career ladders' opportunities in their school buildings:**

Across all models of teacher leadership, teachers highlighted the need for more communication around the programs' launch and implementation, as well as more transparency and greater clarity around roles, expectations, support structures, and selection processes for those participating in their local teacher leadership models.

*“Career Ladders have led to increased student achievement and student success because the highest-performing teachers understand and communicate what it takes to be successful when they wish to move into new positions on the leadership teams. From classroom mentors, to master teachers, assistant principals, and principals, each role builds on the experiences of the other in terms of collecting data, communicating needs, modeling, and measuring progress.”*

—Whitney Wilkowski, Director of Professional Development, Perry Township Schools

## ABOUT TEACH PLUS

Teach Plus is dedicated to the mission of empowering excellent, experienced, and diverse teachers to take leadership over key policy and practice issues that advance equity, opportunity, and student success. In pursuing our mission, Teach Plus is guided by our Student Opportunity Mandate: All students should have the opportunity to achieve their potential in an education system defined by its commitment to equity, its responsiveness to individual needs, and its ability to prepare students for postsecondary success. Since 2009, Teach Plus has developed thousands of teacher leaders across the country to exercise their leadership in shaping education policy and improving teaching and learning for students. [teachplus.org](http://teachplus.org)



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## ENDNOTES

**1** DeVon, D. (2019, January). House Bill 1009: Teacher residency grant pilot program. Indiana General Assembly. <https://iga.in.gov/legislative/2019/bills/house/1009/details>

**2** Behning, R. (2019, January). House Bill 1008: Teacher career ladders. Indiana General Assembly. <https://iga.in.gov/legislative/2019/bills/house/1008/details>

**3** IN State Board of Education. (2020, February). Indiana State Board of Education Approves \$3.1M in Career Ladders Grants. Indiana State Board of Education: February 2020 News Release. <https://www.in.gov/sboe/files/February-2020-News-Release.pdf>

**4** Focus Group Question 5: "For purposes of this study, we define school culture as the shared values, rules, beliefs, teaching and learning approaches, behaviors, and relationships among or across the individuals in a school. In your experience, have there been any shifts in the culture of your school because of the implementation of teacher career ladders? Please explain."

**5** See endnote 4.

**6** See endnote 4.

**7** Focus Group Question 11: "Would you say there have been tangible changes to your district's practice or pedagogy because of the introduction and implementation of this program across your district? Please explain."

**8** See endnote 4.

**9** See endnote 4.

**10** See endnote 4.

**11** See endnote 4.

**12** Focus Group Question 3: "In your experience as a teacher, what impact has the implementation of Teacher Career Ladders and teacher leadership roles had on your school? What benefits or negatives would you want to highlight to a decision maker? Please explain your response."

**13** See endnote 4.

**14** See endnote 4.

**15** See endnote 7.

**16** See endnote 7.

**17** See endnote 7.

**18** See endnote 7.

**19** Focus Group Question 7: "In your experience, has student achievement in your school been impacted by the introduction and implementation of teacher career ladders? Please explain."

**20** Focus Group Question 6: "Based on your experience, has teacher retention in your school been impacted by the introduction and implementation of the teacher career ladder? Please explain."

**21** Focus Group Question 8: "In your opinion, how important would the potential of stepping into a teacher leadership role be in retaining you as a teacher at your school?"

**22** See endnote 20.

**23** See endnote 20.

**24** See endnote 20.

**25** See endnote 20.

**26** Focus Group Question 10: "If your school were to continue implementing Teacher Career Ladders and leadership roles, what recommendations would you make to school leaders to improve?"

**27** See endnote 26.

**28** See endnote 26.

**29** See endnote 26.

**30** See endnote 26.

**31** See endnote 26.

**32** Focus Group Question 9: "Is your school planning on continuing to implement teacher career ladders in the coming school year?"

**33** See endnote 32.

**34** See endnote 32.

**35** See endnote 26.

**36** See endnote 26.

**37** See endnote 20.

**38** See endnote 12.

**39** Focus Group Question 4: “As a teacher, would you like to see the roles created as a result of this Teacher Career Ladder continue in your school? Why?”

**40** See endnote 26.

**41** Focus Group Question 1 & 2: “How familiar are you with the Teacher Career Ladders pilot that has been introduced and implemented in your school and district? Please explain your response to the question above.”

**42** See endnote 41.

**43** See endnote 41.

**44** See endnote 7.

**45** See endnote 7.