

UNTAPPED

TRANSFORMING TEACHER LEADERSHIP TO HELP STUDENTS SUCCEED

For more information, read the full report: *Untapped: Transforming Teacher Leadership to Help Students Succeed*

What Principals Can Do to Transform Teacher Leadership

Across the education field, there is unusual consensus that strong teacher leaders are key to improving our nation's schools. Unfortunately, clear expectations for what teacher leaders should do, and strategies to prepare them to do it, are few and far between. A recent survey found that while 86 percent of urban school districts have teacher leader roles, only 32 percent offered specialized training for teachers stepping into those roles.¹

Assigning teachers to leadership roles without quality training does a double disservice: It takes teaching time away from the educators best prepared to accelerate student learning, and then fails to equip them with the skills they need to lead colleagues to similar success.

The neglected state of teacher leaders is regrettable because we know that with the right support, they can immediately boost academic performance in their schools. Data from the first two years of New Leaders' Emerging Leaders Program (ELP)—a program that provides job-embedded training and coaching to teacher leaders—indicate that even while still in training, almost three quarters of participants were able to increase student learning across the classrooms they supervised.

Developing strong and effective teacher leaders who can guide their colleagues to success should be central to any school improvement strategy, but it requires far more planning and support than it currently receives.

Here are six steps principals can take right away to unleash the untapped potential of teacher leadership at their schools:

- 1. Prioritize shared leadership as a critical strategy for school improvement.**
 - For example, set a time bound goal to collaborate in a key area of responsibility, such as coaching or operations.
- 2. Inventory current and future leadership needs at the school, including expertise to meet challenges posed by new academic standards.**
 - For example, undertake a school needs assessment or have a structured conversation with a supervisor to identify gaps in leadership capacity.
- 3. Assess individual potential to share leadership responsibilities.**
 - For example, look for evidence that individual staff members can lead academic gains, set and exemplify high expectations for all, earn respect and trust among colleagues, navigate difficult conversations and guide colleagues to delivering better instruction.
- 4. Define potential shared leadership responsibilities based on school needs and staff strengths and expertise.**
 - For example, draft a playbook to align discrete responsibilities with individual staff capacity.
- 5. Support targeted opportunities for staff to develop key leadership skills.**
 - For example, develop incremental, job-embedded opportunities for aspiring teacher leaders to road-test their skills, hear feedback on their performance and receive professional development and training that supports those skills.
- 6. Set specific impact goals for teacher leaders.**
 - Communicate your expectations for teachers who take on leadership responsibilities and offer regular feedback to help them meet those expectations.
 - Ensure that teacher leaders establish measurable goals and track progress toward those goals.

¹ Council of Great City Schools. (2015, April.) Assistant principals and teacher leaders in America's Great City Schools. Presented at the Wallace Foundation Principal Pipeline Initiative Convening, New York, NY.